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## MODERN DRAMA

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## Note

The editor will be in Europe from February 1 until June 1. Mail will be forwarded to him from the *Modern Drama* address.

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Tentatively scheduled for December, 1960, is an O'Neill number. Manuscripts for this issue should reach the editor by September 1.

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# THE MLA CONFERENCE ON MODERN DRAMA

## "FOUNDING A CANON: AN OPINIONATED REPORT"

THE FIRST (and generally successful) Modern Drama Conference organized by Professor A. C. Edwards of the University of Kansas met Tuesday, December 29, 1959, at the national meeting of the MLA with more than thirty invited specialists in attendance. Professor Edwards acted as chairman and Professor R. J. Kaufmann of the University of Rochester as secretary. The program consisted of two brief talks and a somewhat longer discussion. The first of the two talks, by Professor Robert Shedd of Ohio State, concerned the proper anthology for a modern drama course. The second, by Professor Edith Kern of the University of Pennsylvania, was on the problems of translating foreign dramas into English.

Professor Shedd's suggestions first raised standard questions: of the chronological scope of "modern drama" (from Büchner, Hebbel and Kleist? or from Ibsen and Strindberg? to World War II? or to an ever receding present?); of criteria of deciding between the History of Modern Drama or a Masters' course (do we, e.g., want to establish continuity chronologically through theatrical usage, through direct influence or through elaboration of common themes, or by any of these means?). Perhaps we would rather read a harmonized selection of several plays each by a very few "great" dramatists with merely formal emphasis and with indifference to historical evolution? Perhaps the time has come to break the modern drama into a 19th century course and a 20th century course? Then we must ask whether these should be consecutive parts of a whole or independent. These and other doubts are, and will remain, endemic in our community of specialists until Modern Drama achieves the formalities of defined academic status. Until we can give it a beginning and an end it will be impossible, save casually, to say what it is, or even what its irreducible canon of texts must be.

Inside this circle of relevant generalities, Professor Shedd placed a very practical enquiry. He and Professor Haskell Block of Wisconsin are doing an anthology of modern dramas to include about forty plays. They have badly wanted to find out just what is being done in modern drama courses around the country and just what we want in the way of texts. They have had difficulty finding out. Once again it is clear that we are less well-integrated into a speciality discipline than are people in comparable fields. We need perhaps to work together to unify our critical and scholarly efforts, thus increasing our mutual

awareness, so that by our own attentiveness to the use of fact and critical opinion we can raise the reigning standard of our field. That the present standard is not so high as it might be is a fact traceable to many causes of which a number emerged obliquely in the general discussion. More of that in a moment.

Professor Shedd's remarks concluded with some words on the jurisdiction problems raised in teaching modern drama. Speech and drama teachers, modern language and English often compete and overlap and (pursuing different critical ends) respect somewhat different standards of excellence. These varying needs further complicate the anthologists' task. It was clear why Professor Edwards asked for a talk on the problems of the anthologist to open this first Conference on Modern Drama, for anthologizing is the engineering phrase of drama criticism which rests upon an antecedent theoretical stage, the ascertaining of a canon. Ignoring this, we improvise.

Professor Kern's remarks on translation, in a necessarily different way, led to some converging reflections on the unifying assumptions behind the discipline called "Modern Drama." Professional translation is necessary because the internal ordering principles of each language differ markedly from all others; still, translation is impossible unless we assume a substratum of common modes of thought, common preoccupations which make these differing "surface parts" interchangeable in the way we call translation. Further, since we work with translated texts a great part of the time, we have to retreat (or advance) to these underlying unifying assumptions; we usually call these themes. But since, with plays, we are not dealing primarily with conceptual systems but with the ways these concepts are rooted, embodied, tested and "imagined" in the cultural idioms of the writers who made these plays, we have to pay more than superficial attention to the language which not only clothes the thoughts but which *conditions* them as well.

Three important related inferences are to be made here. First, the "scope" of modern drama is partly determined by a perceived repertoire of basic artistic themes (resting as they do on the key cultural preoccupations of an epoch) which occur repeatedly and which converge into that type of larger "unity" we call a period *ethos* or a *Zeitgeist*. Secondly, we need translations which are attuned to modern psychological, imagistic and formal awareness so that instructive equivalents can be found for those "poetic" and suggestive features through which we are trained to detect deeper dramatic meanings in work in languages we can read. Third, since the reader of a play has a far more active collaborative role in bringing the text to imaginative life on his mind's stage, than has the reader of the far

more densely specified novel, the dramatic translator is freer to convert the suggestive potential of a foreign play. This is a freedom readily abused, all the more so since traditional limits of verbal suggestions have not been fixed for modern work the way they have been for classics (note here, e.g., the vexed response to Ezra Pound's translation of Sophocles). Clearly, part of what we mean by establishing a canon for modern drama will mean slowly fixing limits to the translators' privileges to adapt and alter (the relationship of Christopher Fry and Giraudoux, and the use of Brecht are illustrative instances). Professor Kern left us with the conviction that (until the day when all of us read all languages) translation is a form of judicial as well as interpretive criticism; we should pay more attention to its critical role.

Professor Edwards initiated the discussion period by reporting briefly the accomplishments and problems of *Modern Drama* after two years of life. It has published fifty-four articles on twenty-six dramatists; it is eager to supply the sort of critical and scholarly services the teachers of modern drama courses in seven hundred American colleges and universities feel in need of; it is working hard to improve the book review section and has enlisted the cooperation of resident scholars in European countries as Contributing Book Review Editors. He also spoke to the question, raised by Professor Block of Wisconsin, of publishing, as a regular feature, surveys of scholarship on great foreign dramatists by the leading scholarly compatriot of each dramatist thus surveyed. That *Modern Drama* can be a gathering point for increasingly professional work in our discipline was the definite and promising sense of Professor Edwards' attitudes and comments.

The undeniable sense of the meeting was affirmative and hopeful; the most authoritative opinion was in favor of increasing professional seriousness in scholarly-critical work in the field of modern drama. There was also a troublingly varied (perhaps even mutually contradictory) set of opinions expressed in the discussion about the nature of what one is "doing" when he specializes in modern drama: the implicit assumptions ranged from the pursuit of essentially theatrical acquaintance, through propagandistic intentions in the use of American drama, to a central curricular function for modern drama in general education on the one hand, and a concerted effort towards achieving improved professional status for the discipline on the other. It seems clear that this first conference exposed our current, loose, confederative status as a group at the same time that it made very clear our desire for a more explicit, tightly ordered regularizing of our standards and our purposes. The conference should definitely be kept in being; perhaps its program could profitably be more formal next year.

R. J. KAUFMANN

## TOWARD A NEW INTERPRETATION OF LENORMAND'S THEATRICAL ETHOS

IN 1951, GABRIEL MARCEL termed H. R. Lenormand, the French playwright, "indisputably the man who contributed most to the French theater between the two World Wars."<sup>1</sup> This assertion would arouse hot dispute, if not ridicule, from most present-day critics, who have pigeonholed Lenormand's dramas in that obscure drawer marked "out of date and dusty."

During the playwright's lifetime (1882-1951), his works were incessantly attacked and deplored by indignant writers proceeding on false assumptions about his dramatic *ethos* and aims. The most influential of these antagonists was André Rouveyre, the powerful drama critic of the *Mercure de France*. Virtually every time a new play by Lenormand appeared, Rouveyre released a flood of sarcastic epithets, condemning the author as a morbid eccentric, a pathological and essentially un-French dramatist.<sup>2</sup>

Because some of Lenormand's plays seemed to evoke striking similarities to psychoanalytical theory, casual critics hastened to label him a disciple of Freud. This unfortunate tag has clung persistently, despite Lenormand's denials of any such relationship. Determination of his real connection with Freudian theory and his fundamental purposes in theatrical creation has remained curiously muddled for more than thirty-five years, since the early 1920's, when Georges and Ludmilla Pitoëff brought Lenormand fame in Paris with their presentations of *Le Temps est un Songe* and *Les Ratés*.

Today it is fashionable in France and in the United States to dismiss Lenormand's drama in entirety as tendentious repetition of Freud's ideas. Recent evidence of this critical truism was provided in January, 1959, by Donald Malcolm, a *New Yorker* theatrical commentator, who poked fun at a production of *The Failures* (Lenormand's *Les Ratés* in English adaptation) presented by David Ross at the Fourth Street Theatre in New York City.<sup>3</sup>

1. Gabriel Marcel, "Le Théâtre de H.-R. Lenormand," *Opéra* (Paris), February 21, 1951.  
2. See, e.g., André Rouveyre, "Les Ratés," *Mercure de France*, January 1, 1929, p. 158; and the same critic's comments in *Mercure de France*, March 1, 1930, pp. 408-412.

3. "It is pleasant to reflect that the discoveries of Sigmund Freud have improved the lives and fortunes not only of madmen but of playwrights as well. Immense new prospects were opened when it became possible for a playwright to exhibit his hero laughing, say, at the funeral of his grandmother, in the comfortable certainty that a few words about the Oedipus complex would restore the sympathies of the spectator and stifle the censure of the critics. It is true, of course, that the Freudian drama was not always the miracle of finish and plausibility that we so admire today. Years of experiment were necessary to achieve that refinement. And last week an interesting relic of those years was brought to light (and almost immediately

One need hardly expect authoritative dramatic criticism from *The New Yorker*; what is pertinent to note is that Mr. Malcolm's blithe interpretation represents only a simplified instance of the nearly automatic attitude toward Lenormand's plays assumed by most contemporary critics. The equation, "Drama by Lenormand equals psychoanalytical theorizing" is implicitly accepted in advance, even though this identification is more deceptive than illuminating. Brooks Atkinson, usually a careful, perceptive observer of French plays on and off Broadway, also fell into this tempting snare when he reviewed *The Failures* for *The New York Times* on January 7, 1959. While admitting that "M. Lenormand's literary style is remarkable" and comparing the technique of his dramatic delineation to "the way Toulouse-Lautrec used his pencil or brush . . . relaxed and limpid but also pithy," Atkinson found the play "soft and diffuse." Perhaps, he suggested, spectators in 1959 were no longer moved by *The Failures* because "we are more familiar now with M. Lenormand's psychoanalytical point of view than audiences were in 1923."<sup>4</sup>

Was Lenormand actually propounding textbook psychology or a psychoanalytical point of view in *The Failures* and throughout all his plays, as countless critics have inferred? Close examination of his dramas, considered in the light of the playwright's explanations of his ideals and practices in the theater, reveals the essential error of this stereotyped interpretation.

By nature, Lenormand was basically unscientific and unphilosophical. During his boyhood and youth, mainly under the influence of his father (a composer of revolutionary exotic music), he developed an exalted credo for artistic creation founded on the principle that art transcends and justifies life. For him, as for his father, art *was* life. All else had merely tangential significance.

Lenormand's accession to fame as a dramatist shortly after World War I coincided with a period of overwhelming psychological and spiritual disillusionment for young Frenchmen. More than two years before Pirandello's dramas were introduced in France by Dullin and Pitoëff, Lenormand had bared the ambivalent and multi-faceted psyches of disintegrated characters in *Time is a Dream* (1919), *The Failures* (1920), and *Le Simoun* (1920). This chronology has been overlooked too often by critics who have suspected Pirandellian influence on Lenormand's theater. Rather than Freud or Pirandello,

restored to darkness) when "The Failures," by H. R. Lenormand, opened (and closed) at the Fourth Street Theatre. M. Lenormand's play was first performed in New York in the early nineteen-twenties and failed, presumably because it was ahead of its time. The present production failed for the contrary reason, and therein lies its interest, for the play exhibits, much more clearly than its sophisticated successors, the limitation of textbook psychology in the drama." Donald Malcolm, "Off Broadway," *The New Yorker*, January 17, 1959, p. 66.

<sup>4</sup> Brooks Atkinson, "Theatre: 'The Failures,'" *The New York Times*, January 7, 1959, p. 29.

Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Strindberg, and Poe were the central inspirations for these first important dramas.

To trace the growth and evolution of Lenormand's lifelong preoccupation with psychological anomalies, it is necessary to specify the significant literary influences of his early years. The playwright provided this enlightenment candidly in his remarkable *Confessions d'un Auteur dramatique*,<sup>5</sup> recounting his adolescent admiration for the writings of Jules Verne, Edgar Allan Poe, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Tolstoi, Turgenev, Maeterlinck, Shakespeare, and the Elizabethan dramatists Tourneur, Dekker, Middleton and Webster.<sup>6</sup>

Verne's adventure stories stirred Lenormand during his early adolescence to dream of distant lands and the outlandish behavior of exotic peoples. When about fifteen, the future playwright fell under the spell of Poe's macabre tales, particularly *The Fall of the House of Usher*. "Poe," he later admitted, "drew me obstinately toward the gateway of dreams."<sup>7</sup> It was entirely natural, therefore, that Lenormand's first dramatic masterpiece, *Time Is a Dream*, be largely inspired by the playwright's discovery in Holland of a mansion recalling Poe's House of Usher.<sup>8</sup>

Lenormand was also entranced, at the age of fourteen and fifteen, by the skill of the Russian novelists, especially Dostoevsky, Tolstoi, and Turgenev. Their hallucinatory sorcery first convinced the French youth that "Cartesian man," whom he considered the prototype of his countrymen's literature, constituted only a fragmentary incarnation of the psychological mysteries intimated by the great Russians, Poe, and Maeterlinck. While a young dramatist, Lenormand decided to suggest in the theater the secret, complex manifestations of human personality by using techniques radically different from the standardized theatrical patterns typical of the French drama in the early years of the twentieth century.

At fifteen, Lenormand adapted parts of Turgenev's *Dimitri Roudine* in a story of Alpine romance, *Sur l'Alpe*. Many years before he had heard of Freud or of psychoanalysis, when he was only about sixteen,<sup>9</sup> the future playwright was "inflamed by Nietzsche" and spellbound by Dostoevsky's stories. Poe's hypnotic accounts of madness and crime were perhaps the most vibrant single literary stimulus for Lenormand's adolescent imagination. A violent, sadistic sketch describing a madman, *La Démence de William Howlson*, written in 1896 or 1897, imitated Poe's choices of proper names and sites. This was Lenormand's

5. H.-R. Lenormand, *Les Confessions d'un Auteur dramatique* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1949, 1953), 2 vols. (Further notes will refer to these volumes as *Confessions I, II*.)

6. *Ibid.*, I, pp. 76-78, 81-82, 94, 108-112.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

8. See Lenormand's statement in Léon Lemonnier, *Edgar Poe et les Poètes français* (Paris: Plon, 1934), p. 230.

9. See *Confessions*, I, pp. 76-78.

first literary portrait of mental aberration, later to be a recurrent theme in his mature plays.

The dramatist also discovered psychological ambivalence before he became acquainted with Freud's theories. In 1896, when fourteen, Lenormand fell in love with a niece of his parents' landlord during a vacation near Saint-Malo. A brief, unfulfilled idyll inspired him to write fragments of a projected novelette entitled *La Joyeuse Douleur*. This manuscript depicts the simultaneous exaltation and anguish of two young lovers, with the sonorous accompaniment of wild tempests pounding the shores of Brittany. The story's title foreshadowed the ambivalent psychological impulses which permeate Lenormand's characterizations in his most important plays. Ambivalent instincts of self-destruction and yearning for a spiritual ideal permitting reconciliation with life are dramatized in such characters, for example, as Nico (*Time is a Dream*), "Lui" (*The Failures*), Laurency (*Le Simoun*), Jacques (*The Coward*), Jarl (*La Folle du Ciel*), and Lolita (*La Maison des Remparts*).

Lenormand's dramatic universe was perhaps closer to Strindberg's than to that of any other playwright. In 1900, at the age of eighteen, he had read the Swedish author's *Inferno* but had failed to comprehend it. He rediscovered Strindberg's plays in 1916, when he saw a German troupe perform *The Dance of Death* in Davos, Switzerland. A few months later, Lenormand also witnessed the same troupe's production of *The Ghost Sonata*. Strindberg's plays dazzled him with their awesome power. He immediately obtained and devoured an English translation of a collection of these dramas, including *Inferno*.<sup>10</sup>

In 1916, Lenormand was rewriting *Time is a Dream* and *The Failures*. The disintegrated personalities in these two dramas reflect the playwright's interest not in Freud, but in Poe, Maeterlinck, and Strindberg. Throughout his entire career, Lenormand was to remain enthralled by Strindberg's plays and the astonishing affiliations they seemed to suggest with the nightmarish, disunified psyches portrayed in his own theater. In an unpublished speech of homage to Strindberg delivered in 1948 in Paris, the French dramatist reiterated his feeling of close affinity to the Swedish author's theatrical world, primarily because both had emphasized above all the essential ambivalence of modern man:

When questioning myself on the subject of Strindberg, I discover within me a strange feeling of consanguinity, almost of filiation. It is not, in this case, a question of literary debt or of influence. It is instead—despite the difference in times, countries, and cultures—a fraternity of outlook toward the human being.

... Strindberg has built up, in a sort of anticipation, a fright-

10. See *Ibid.*, pp. 251-252.

fully exact portrait of modern man, his behavior and what he is becoming. He has shown man ravaged by his own ambivalences, his nightmares, his remorse and his cruelty.

Arthur Rimbaud forecast, three quarters of a century ago, "the age of murderers." It has come! If one surveys what man has made of the world in the last twenty years, one is astonished to observe how completely the earthly inferno of Strindberg has taken on the aspect and shape of reality.<sup>11</sup>

Lenormand obviously took perverse satisfaction in noting that Rimbaud's and Strindberg's visionary prophecies of moral degradation had been fulfilled by 1948, when Hitler's pogroms had already presented ample proof that "the age of murderers" was indeed at hand. Even as a boy, Lenormand had a strange sort of split personality. Outwardly gentle and well behaved, an excellent student, he was inwardly obsessed by imaginative visions of cruelty, madness, vice, inhuman tortures, and moral chaos:

I would have liked, in my youth, to see sadism and inhumanity rise up from beneath my footsteps. In the secret confines of his rotting heart, the writer will always prefer, over and above the desires for harmony, equilibrium, and progress obsessing social man, a dramatic chaos and the groans of the oppressed.<sup>12</sup>

Despite this secret intellectual sadism, Lenormand was never a misogynist or a perverse, pathological misfit in society. He found abundant joy in living. An incorrigible Don Juan, he also delighted in music, fine food and wine, the discovery of new literary talents, conversation, globetrotting, and the company of fellow playwrights—O'Neill, Elmer Rice, and Theodore Dreiser were the American dramatists he knew best and most respected.

Lenormand considered his own split personality characteristic of his times. Every sensitive twentieth-century man, he asserted, will inevitably take a dual perspective toward existence in the machine age. When asked by an interviewer in 1930, "Do you like modern life?" the dramatist responded by pointing out that each of us possesses two personalities constantly fighting one against the other, two fundamentally opposite reactions to life battling to gain the upper hand:

Modern life, with all its surprises, interests me passionately; towards it I have the greatest curiosity. At the same time, I have the most intense anxiety about everything destroyed by its mechanism. Confronted with modern existence, men of our generations cannot have anything else but a double attitude. We live with two personalities in almost constant conflict.<sup>13</sup>

Love of life clashing with anxiety and anguish due to the aimlessness

11. Lenormand, "Hommage à Auguste Strindberg," unpublished speech written and delivered in Paris in 1948. [Mme Marie Kalff Lenormand possesses the typescript.]

12. *Confessions*, I, p. 85.

13. Lenormand, interview with Marius Richard, "Au fond aimez-vous la vie moderne?" in *La Liberté* (Paris), November 18, 1930.

of modern existence is a crucial theme in Lenormand's dramas. His brooding, ambivalent protagonists who are torn asunder in this clash—Nico, Laurency, "Lui," Sarterre (the degenerate composer of *Une Vie secrète*), Jacques, and Jarl—prefigured the anguished characters created by such diverse contemporary playwrights as Anouilh, Camus, Salacrou, Sartre, and Beckett. From 1919, when Lenormand's renown began with the productions of *Time is a Dream* in Geneva and Paris, until 1942, when he published *La Maison des Remparts*, this leitmotif animated his principal plays. Viewed as a whole, his drama is centered more intrinsically on this axis than on psychoanalytical theory or on analysis of pathological motivations.

Lenormand, himself a dual, ambivalent personality, was fascinated by the phenomena of ambivalence even as a child and youth. This fascination was intensified by his youthful admiration for the works of Nietzsche, Poe, and Dostoevsky. When Lenormand first came upon Freud's theories in written form in 1917 (by reading A. A. Brill's translation in English of *The Interpretation of Dreams*),<sup>14</sup> this was simply an additional phase in the development of his passion for unearthing the hidden secrets of man's impulses.

*Time is a Dream* and *The Failures*, Lenormand's first important plays, were written almost concurrently during the period between 1912 and 1916. Nico van Eyden, the hero of *Time is a Dream*, is a key character for interpretation of Lenormand's scenic focus on psychological aberration and for an understanding of his entire dramatic *ethos*.

Nico is the playwright's deliberately twisted configuration of contemporaneous questioning and doubt concerning the meanings of time, existence, and death. This young Hollander eventually gives up his life to an unknown force attracting him inexorably toward another world. The exact reason for his impulse to commit suicide is at least partially enigmatic. By interpreting accurately Nico's peculiar anguish, we can glimpse the playwright's implied concept of the spiritual decrimation and aimlessness marking the present century. This concept of modern anguish forms the crux of Lenormand's theatrical *ethos*.

The dramatic poignancy of *Time is a Dream* is created through the spectators' almost immediate apprehension of Nico's imminent mental and spiritual disintegration. How did Lenormand envision this haunted Dutchman obsessed by the idea that time and life are only shadowy illusions? No abstract metaphysical or scientific doctrine was on the author's mind when he wrote the play. A common misconception inferred that *Time is a Dream* was designed to illustrate Einstein's "theory of relativity" or Bergsonian philosophy. This was not the case.

14. See *Confessions*, I, pp. 259-261.

Lenormand was unaware even of Einstein's name and knew nothing of scientific "relativity" during the years 1912-1916, and he was not versed in Bergson's ideas.<sup>15</sup>

Nico, like most of Lenormand's central characters, was a dramatic transposition of a real person whom the writer had encountered or heard about during his extensive travels. Touring the Netherlands shortly after his marriage in December, 1911, with the Dutch actress, Marie Kalff, Lenormand met a young Hollander having many of the traits he later attributed to Nico. As he wandered in the foggy marshes along the Vecht River, the dramatist came upon a strange residence which struck him as the exact replica of Poe's House of Usher. At this instant, the conception of the atmospheric background for *Time is a Dream* originated in Lenormand's imagination. What intrigued him in this melancholy Dutch landscape was its oppressive aura of physical stagnation. The dreary ponds and dense fogs of the Utrecht region so stimulated him that he immediately conceived the symbolic character of Nico, lost in morbid reverie and tormented by a specifically modern reaction against accepted concepts of reality and spiritual value.<sup>16</sup>

One of Lenormand's most unusual tendencies was his lifelong preoccupation with fantastic, outlandish, and occult phenomena. The unthinkable and the inscrutable always captivated him. When he became a playwright, he constructed his dramas as reflections of an ineradicable belief that the most profound value of the theater is its unique power to intimate man's mysterious and inexplicable motivations. In his opinion, no system of ethics could entirely control these enigmatic impulses. This conviction permeates his dramas. A bizarre, almost indefinable aura of mystery hovers over many of the crucial characterizations in Lenormand's theater, from Nico in *Time is a Dream* to Lolita in *La Maison des Remparts*.

Nico is one of the most memorable and most baffling characters in Lenormand's plays. Having lived in Java and the East Indies after a childhood spent in the Dutch lowlands near Utrecht, Nico comes back to Holland as a young man. He very quickly senses the untraversable gulf separating the mystic Eastern view of life he has acquired in the Indies and the unquestioning acceptance of time and reality found in Holland. Nico is soon shattered emotionally. The fogs of Utrecht plunge him into morbid doubt about physical reality. In this destructive atmosphere, he laments, one becomes more and more inextricably bound in the chains of time. While living in Java, on the contrary, he had achieved reconciliation with life through the Oriental passiveness toward the unknowable and recognition that it is futile to separate time into past, present, and future.

15. See *Ibid.*, p. 204.

16. See *Ibid.*, pp. 200-203.

However, Nico is not a philosopher. He can best be understood as an instinctive aesthete, an *émotif*. In the Indies, Nico had learned how to escape from thoughts of time and destiny. A fundamentally Romantic and aesthetic ideal—obliviousness of Fate through creation of an individual, unreal universe to replace harsh reality—was a form of escapism that attracted many of Lenormand's central characters. Jacques in *The Coward*, Sarterre in *Une Vie secrète*, and the playwright in *Crépuscule du Théâtre* are other notable illustrations of this escapist inclination.

The fragile, ineffable beauty of life is defined by Nico in a musical simile quite characteristic of Lenormand's aesthetic as a dramatist. Life's duration, says Nico, resembles that of an exquisite musical sound, a mysterious harmony destined to be broken without reason or warning at a pre-determined instant:

It is a thing you understand all of a sudden, around the age of thirty. . . . One day, in Ceylon, I was alone on a mountain peak. There was a rose-colored mist hovering over the rocks, and the sun was setting in a marvelous gulf of light. Suddenly I heard an inexplicable sound. It seemed to be coming from the sun; it was very sweet in tone, clear, and sure. It ceased at the end of a few moments, with a distinct termination, as though it had fulfilled its role. . . .

What was it, in reality? I hardly know; but to me, it was exactly like life. . . .

Human life. An inexplicable harmony, reverberating for a few seconds, and ending at a pre-determined moment, marked in advance.

A chord of music, condemned despite its enchantment and its purity to be interrupted abruptly, without reason or warning. . . . Ah! The second that lovely note was silenced, I really understood the savage and useless stupidity of the laws of life.<sup>17</sup>

Life's aesthetic raptures, its moments of mysterious spiritual ecstasy convey the real values of human existence, Nico implies. When this ecstasy vanishes, life becomes useless and stupid. In a conversation with Andrée Sikorska, the French novelist, Lenormand once remarked, "A mon idée, la musique de Mozart est le Bien; quant au Mal, je l'ignore." The playwright's identification of artistic perfection with ethics and his utter disregard for ordinary moral standards have never been more concisely and trenchantly stated.

In *Time is a Dream*, Nico rejects life. Why? Had he not learned to savor its joys and its tranquility in Java? Is his suicide an act of dementia? It is undeniable that Nico's mental collapse does not evince complete dramatic plausibility. The circumstances forcing him to stay in the pernicious atmosphere of the Dutch mists are too contrived.

17. *Le Temps est un Songe, Théâtre complet* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1921-1942), I, p. 178. (The abbreviation *T. c.* will hereafter be used to denote this edition.)

Nico first discovers that his fiancée, in a prophetic hallucination, had seen his lifeless face emerging from the pond near his home. He becomes obsessed by ruminations about the secret of his destiny concealed in the fog-enshrouded pond. A sudden, ill-timed sickness in the family prevents his escape from this obsessive influence. The drama's somber conclusion indicates that Nico has disappeared to unite with the dark water of the pond.

Nico does not kill himself because life appears despicable. His tormented spirit and his delusion that the inscrutable pool of water contains an answer to the enigmas of existence and death are components of his thirst for absolute knowledge and the longing to attain unquestioning faith in a cosmic solution for man's anguish. Before his disappearance, Nico reminisced that only in the Indies was he able to avoid pondering life's mysteries:

Then we left again for the Indies. There, the mind becomes peaceful very quickly. You no longer suffer from the unknowable. You accept life. Here, you refuse it. You wish to understand! (*Bitterly.*) To understand? To believe, that's what you really need. Destiny or freedom, soul or matter, you must rely on one of those empty words. That is the price of tranquility. My malady is not being willing or able to be a dupe.<sup>18</sup>

Nico's explanation of his anguish is of capital importance. It is the key to Lenormand's entire dramatic *ethos* in its refusal to accept any traditional framework of belief and in its tortured aspiration for a new kind of faith, an authentic ideal to supplant the hypocritical and futile ideologies to which twentieth-century man has tried frantically to cling. Lenormand himself was ravaged by Nico's "malady," the unwillingness to be duped by conventional European and Western moral dogma. The author of *Time is a Dream* was in constant rebellion against all religious constraints, all traditional standards of good and evil, all doctrines exacting intellectual, social, or moral conformity.

Like Nico, Lenormand sought in vain a new basis for acceptance of life's ultimate purpose. A sense of unfulfilled longing for a satisfying faith pervades his theater. From this tormented desire arise the spiritual anxiety and tension, half-hidden yet almost constantly implied, corroding the psychological stamina and balance of Lenormand's typical protagonists, such as Nico, "Lui," Laurency, Jacques, Sarterre, and Lolita.

The following scenes from Lenormand's dramas contain the most striking instances of this indefinite but crucial spiritual aspiration for an answer to the problem of life's meaning:

1. "Lui," the unsuccessful playwright in *The Failures*, has just killed his wife. He conjectures desperately about whether she may now find

18. *Ibid.*, p. 198.

"the infinite" they had groped for in misery and moral degradation:

LUI. Your eyes seem to know . . . to understand something . . . What if hope were not as absurd as I always believed? Could it be possible that everything is not finished? Can you look back and see our suffering? Do you understand it? And the infinite we always looked for in our misery and filth—is that revealed to you now? (*An anxious silence.*) Or do you have no more memories, no more conscience? Are you only on the shores where something else is beginning? The first day of another life?<sup>19</sup>

2. In *Le Simoun*, "The Old Man" and an Algerian prophet argue about universal annihilation and immortality:

THE OLD MAN, *wagging his head in disagreement*. No, Sidi, I'll not pray for the end of man.

THE PROPHET. It will come nevertheless. And the frightful dream of the universe will be obliterated. Rejoice! I predict the whirlpool's last spiral! I foretell the great, free sleep of the uncreated!

THE OLD MAN. I'll not rejoice at such news, if it is true. . . .

THE PROPHET, *ironically*. Then go ask God for eternity for every hair on your head, and every bend of your intestines.

THE OLD MAN. You want life to be extinguished. . . . But you are nearly a hundred years old and still living. You say, "Lie down in dust," but you are sitting, prophesying, proclaiming curses. You say the universe is a dream . . . but you have its sickness, like a fever. You scoff at believers, but you believe in nothingness. Are you sure of your belief? Perhaps you're no more sure of it than we are of Paradise. You seek. . . . What, you know not. You are with us . . . in anguish. . . .<sup>20</sup>

3. Sarterre, the composer in *Une Vie secrète*, tries to jeer at the faith in life's spiritual essence professed by his wife, Thérèse:

THÉRÈSE. . . . I know that you're not living all of life! I know there is something else!

SARTERRE. Not for me!

THÉRÈSE, *with deep conviction*. There is something else!

SARTERRE. Not in me!

THÉRÈSE. In you as in every human being! There exists, above us, a truth. I've found it! I possess it and live by it.

SARTERRE. You've found the illusion created by your own longings.

THÉRÈSE, *in almost ecstatic certainty*. I've found what makes me eternal.

SARTERRE. Name it.

THÉRÈSE. Call it soul, love, the infinite, as you will. I have found what exalts my miserable flesh and what saves it. I have found what takes away shame and grief, what opens the gates to hope. . . . If you rebel so furiously against that . . . it is because that is already in your heart.

19. *Les Ratés*, in *T. c.*, I, p. 138.

20. *Le Simoun*, in *T. c.*, II, pp. 81-82.

SARTERRE (*laughing*). Ha! Ha! Ha!<sup>21</sup>

4. Jacques, the artist-protagonist in *The Coward*, after having renounced men's folly in supporting the first World War, claims that his own salvation will be attained not through human values but by self-obliteration in mystic worship of an ethereal world, the world of pure aesthetic rapture:

JACQUES. I must drink in that dark gleam reigning between the worlds. . . . I must not look downward, but up into the atmosphere, where nothing alive can subsist. . . . I find my delight in that blue where air and substance are absent, the blue where man would suffocate. I need only to look, and to bless space for being void and for having the appearance of nothingness. But no, even that is still too human. I must neither see, feel, nor think. . . . I must finish *being* . . . and go to sleep.<sup>22</sup>

The moral ambivalence and the unrequited spiritual aspiration underlying Lenormand's theatrical *ethos* rise to an extraordinary climax in *La Maison des Remparts*, an unperformed drama published in 1942. Lenormand deemed this work the apogée of his theater, even though the Vichy government prevented its presentation in France.

Moral degeneracy is the predominant motif of *La Maison des Remparts*. René and André Malfilatre, father and son, are competing for the favor of Julie, a prostitute from "the house on the ramparts" in a Norman village. Julie aspires to a better life than that to be found in a bordello, but when she tries to flee to a new existence with André, the jealous father kills her.

In spite of the suffocating atmosphere of degradation penetrating the drama, Lenormand maintained that its poetic qualities and the glimmer of aspiration perceptible in the final scenes transcend its surface immorality and gloominess:

This is not a gay play. It is not a pleasant play. It is not a ribald play. It is a fresco where sadness, desire, and passions resolve into poetry. And in the conclusion, from the very depths of the drama, there is born a glimmer of light which should win me pardon for the arid, gloomy shadows where the action takes place.<sup>23</sup>

Lenormand's view of the play indicates the poetic transmutation to be found in the play itself, the alchemic process of theatrical art he always sought in his dramas. Like Dostoevsky, Tolstoi, Turgenev, and Chekhov, whose works he had admired since his youth, Lenormand felt that sadness, misery, defeat and moral decadence were among the most poignant of all themes for the novel and the drama.

*La Maison des Remparts* culminates the revelation of Lenormand's persevering attempt to depict both the moral degeneracy menacing his

21. *Une Vie secrète*, in *T. c.*, III, pp. 242-243.

22. *Le Lâche*, in *T. c.*, V, pp. 59-60.

23. Lenormand, interview in *Comœdia* (Brussels), April 24, 1942.

contemporaries and their half-conscious yearning to find a new spiritual basis for their lives. The play outlines in dark tones twentieth-century society's ambivalent reactions to moral corruption. Lenormand's typical amalgam of lament, protest, and compassion in witnessing contemporaneous ethics and his longing to resolve the modern dilemma of spiritual disunity and chaos are revealed in bold, relentless tableaux of apparent despair. But the concluding scenes portraying the strange relationship between André and a mystical prostitute, Lolita, suggest hope for spiritual redemption in the next world, if not in this one. The inhabitants of a bordello and André, one of the most frequent clients, discuss God's justice in one of Lenormand's most unusual paradoxes. Lolita, mirroring the author's tendency to commingle poetic revery and groping toward a spiritual absolute, invokes divine retribution upon the murderer of Julie. Mother Bunel (the madam of the brothel), André, and another prostitute, Paulette, debate whether there is such a thing as God's justice. God will certainly chastise the killer, asserts Paulette:

PAULETTE. The good Lord won't let him end in peace, anyhow.

MOTHER BUNEL. You're right, Paulette. When it comes to justice, we don't have much to expect from men. But from God, that's different.<sup>24</sup>

Lolita, a South American girl who has visions of events transpiring in a supernatural world, assures André that she is certain of God's redemptive love. The shock of Julie's death has given a revelation of divine goodness to Lolita. She henceforth has faith that God will offer even to prostitutes rebirth and rediscovery of purity.

LOLITA. There's one thing I would have liked to give her—to Julie, I mean. It's something that came to me, when I was close to death. . . .

ANDRÉ. What was it, Lolita?

LOLITA. A kind of confidence . . . a happiness in my soul. Even if any man at all has the power to drag us through mud, humiliate us, destroy us, that makes no difference, you know. Because there is . . . someone for whom we will always be pure, innocent, intact. There is someone who will never let us down, who will rescue all the scum of the earth—yes, even your father—and who will give them the same love he gave to his angels. . . . Oh! If only I could have led Julie to meet him, he would have helped her to die.

ANDRÉ, *greatly moved*. Is it possible!

LOLITA. Since I've known him, that one up there, I'm not afraid of the winter any more. I'm not afraid of my work, or of dying. I'm not afraid of anything at all now.<sup>25</sup>

This scene of secure confidence in spiritual purification appears to

24. *La Maison des Remparts*, in *T. c.*, X, p. 177.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 182-183.

be evidence of Lenormand's ultimate hope for mankind's redemption via the tortuous pathways of suffering and vice. Such an interpretation is substantiated by observation of similar yearnings expressed in the characterizations of the playwright and his wife in *The Failures*, Sarterre and Thérèse in *Une Vie secrète*, and the hunter and the seagull of *La Folle du Ciel*, the haunting Arctic fairy-tale drama.

As we have seen, Lenormand's plays have ordinarily been classified as Freudian treatises or as pathological, amoral and dour forecasts of human decadence. During the 1920's, there grew up a critical legend identifying Lenormand as a prophet of Evil, the dynamic, positive force effacing man's will power. Each of these interpretations is erroneous, at least in part. Despite Lenormand's professed desire to remain intellectually objective, "a-religious" and aloof from morality and ethics in his dramas, he was intrinsically an unrepentant perfectionist. He believed fervently that the theater should regain its ancient spiritual function. In short, Lenormand was first of all a moralist who never abandoned hope for the spiritual regeneration of his fellow men and the human species of the future. This sort of idealistic theatrical *ethos* is now out of fashion, and the current disrepute of Lenormand's plays may stem, in some degree, from the apparently outmoded moral perspectives they imply.

Critics have often been misled by the surface pessimism and amorality of *The Failures*, *Le Simoun*, *The Coward*, *L'Homme et ses Fantômes* and Lenormand's other dramas. The playwright, when pressed to define the moral viewpoints he meant to dramatize in these works, invariably answered that he was not a moralist, a thinker, or a philosopher, but simply a dramatic author. He had no intention of proposing any single, unified view. However, Lenormand realized that his professed amorality was not applied consistently in his plays, since frequent indications of implicit moral attitudes appear. Recognizing this evident contradiction between his dramatic purposes and results, he tried to explain (in unpublished notes) that an artist may strive to be intellectually and morally objective even while a God and a Demon fight relentless battles in his heart:

I have been told, 'You deny the existence of moral values, and yet you conceive of Evil as an active force, and you endow it with the real existence of a perverse angel.' I have been told, 'You claim to examine, without exalting or condemning, the truths buried in the depths of consciousness. You maintain that you have no other aim than that of discovering and exposing these lost secrets—but still, despite this apparent detachment toward which you strive, one senses that you take sides and allow yourself to suggest involuntary judgments. In a word, the artist in you obeys a moral conscience.'

I believe that these contradictions actually exist in my theater.

I maintain that an artist's intelligence may deny the existence of Good and Evil as active forces and, at the same moment, sense that a God and a Demon wage war on each other within his heart. I maintain that one can be cerebrally objective and spiritually inflamed. If my art contains these contradictions, it is because my human nature contains them, first of all. What can you expect? The man of today is full of contrasts. Conscience retains certain moral values rejected by one's intelligence. And these unresolved contradictions, these exhausting conflicts which give our epoch such a tormented aspect are, to my way of thinking, one of the forms taken by Fatality in the elaboration of individual destiny.<sup>26</sup>

The essential ethic conflict of Lenormand's plays is implied in this statement. Modern man is inevitably double. Though he may be spiritually afire, the real basis for his judgments and decisions is most often intellectual. Nico, "Lui," Sarterre, and Jacques exemplify this internal duality and the consequent struggle between the two polarities of man's being. In the depths of his spirit, Nico accepts the joy of Oriental mysticism, with its refusal to be fettered by the bonds of time; but in his intellect, he cannot ignore the irresistible destruction wrought by the temporal forces of *métal*, spiritual, and social habits. Nico is crushed in the shock of two opposing energies: the instinctive struggling of the spirit toward reconciliation with life and the cerebral conviction that this is impossible because of modern positivistic denial that life has a spiritual meaning.

Most of Lenormand's principal characters are morally and psychologically dissevered by anxieties, anguish, and doubt. The playwright often used the word "inquiétude" to typify the modern temperament portrayed in his dramas. In a newspaper interview of 1925, Lenormand declared that a dual anxiety underlay the characteristic torments of his contemporaries:

"The double anxiety haunting us [is] that of a man in the process of becoming and the world in the process of becoming."<sup>27</sup>

Speculation concerning individual destiny and the collective fate of the future human species preoccupied Lenormand more and more after 1925. His deepest moral concern as a dramatist was to suggest the menace of dehumanization in modern existence and in times to come. Like Duhamel, Giraudoux, Sartre, and Anouilh, he sensed that *Homo sapiens* was embarking on a terrifying voyage toward transformation into an automaton. Man, he thought, was slowly evolving into a machine under tyrannical control. Fear of this robot-like existence developed into an obsession in Lenormand's thinking after 1935, when he began to see the awful results of Hitler's propaganda as it reduced German mobs to racial bigots and inhuman super-patriots. Frustrated

26. Unpublished notes written about 1927. [Mme Lenormand possesses the Ms.]  
27. "Le Théâtre d'avant-garde et ses tendances," *Le Nouveau Journal* (Lyon), March 10, 1925.

and infuriated by political censorship of his dramas in France, Lenormand predicted with frightful accuracy the advent of controlled-thought régimes and the sway of ignorant conformism. In unpublished notes written about 1946, he laid bare these apprehensions:

Even if it is true that future generations must rediscover their equilibrium only through the barbarous unification of collective conscience and common consent to authoritarian truths, I shall strive until my death, with the feeble means at the disposal of the solitary rebel, to retard the establishment of the universal den of termites.

... Today our escapism, contradictions, incoherence, and even our folly terrify me less than the nightmare of a race of human insects having the qualities of perfected automatons, with strictly hereditary memory and a subconscious mind relieved of our anguish, our terrors, our criminal desires and longings for freedom—these last guarantees of the individual nature of personality.<sup>28</sup>

This vision of a future human species deprived of individual anguish, terror, and destructive impulses suggests a revealing clue for interpretation of Lenormand's dramatic *ethos*. According to the playwright, fear, anxiety, and the will to retain individual liberty even through antisocial aggression are man's most precious states of mind. They have to be preserved tenaciously, for they are the surest signs of individual uniqueness. In fact, ethics must be based fundamentally on the individual's true perception of his unique nature. Therefore anguish, terror, and criminal instincts should be treasured above all others! Here is the hidden, central idea inspiring Lenormand's theater and its superabundance of aboulic heroes, in all their weaknesses, vices, and psychological aberrations.

Plays such as *Time is a Dream*, *The Failures*, *Le Simoun*, *L'Homme et ses Fantômes*, *The Coward*, *Une Vie secrète*, *La Folle du Ciel*, and *La Maison des Remparts* indeed constitute a theater of anguish. Yet these dramas do not indicate that it is impossible to escape the modern quagmire of moral disintegration and spiritual aimlessness, as many critics have presumed. Lenormand's dramatic *ethos* neither wallows in decadence nor flees from it. No ready answers are depicted through psychoanalytical solutions; the spiritual torments of Nico, "Lui," Sarterre, Jacques, and André remain essentially inscrutable.

The most unusual dramatic and ethical animus underlying Lenormand's portrayals of human degeneracy and failure is the suggestion, in predominantly disillusioned tones, that the mainsprings of man's individuality are moral and spiritual terror and anguish. Lacking these feelings, man is no more than a subjugated robot, an unthinking and totally passive machine.

KENNETH S. WHITE

28. Unpublished notes written in 1946. [Mme Lenormand possesses the typescript.]

# THE PLAYS OF D. H. LAWRENCE

## I

IN 1913 D. H. LAWRENCE spoke of his plays as relaxation from the more arduous work of novel writing: "I enjoy so much writing my plays—they come so quick and exciting from the pen—that you mustn't growl at me if you think them a waste of time."<sup>1</sup> Although he wrote seven plays and a fragment,<sup>2</sup> Lawrence didn't take his dramatic work very seriously, and when two of his plays were given stage performances, he didn't bother to see them. *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd* was done in London in 1926 and *David* the following year, but Lawrence, who was living in Italy at the time, wrote that he couldn't come.<sup>3</sup> In fact, he rarely went to the theater, so his knowledge of the drama was fairly well limited to texts rather than stage presentations. Lawrence seldom talks about the theater in his letters, but does mention that he prefers Synge and Shakespeare above other playwrights.<sup>4</sup> Catherine Carswell sums up Lawrence's attitude toward his plays when she comments on his refusal to attend the performance of *David*: "But Lawrence would not risk the strain and disappointment. Though he always had a half a hope that one of his plays would succeed on stage, I doubt if he had much belief in them as stage plays, or if he felt their failure acutely."<sup>5</sup>

For the most part critics have ignored Lawrence's plays. They are justified in that none of them is very good drama and contains nothing new in dramatic technique. They are important, however, in their relationship to Lawrence's other work, as they do reflect and sometimes severely qualify the themes of his other forms. If we are to praise Lawrence as an important thinker as well as an artist, as Mr. Leavis does, then we had better know the plays where his ideas are not always the same as in his novels. In the differences between *Touch and Go* and *Women in Love*, which I shall treat later, we find that Lawrence has handled the theme of industrial England in opposing ways. A case, then, can be made for the plays, and in this paper I pro-

1. *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. Aldous Huxley, 2nd. ed. (London: Heinemann, 1932), p. 90.

2. The plays in chronological order are: *A Collier's Friday Night* (1906-07), *The Married Man* (1912), *Altitude* (1912), *The Merry-Go-Round* (1912), *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd* (1913), *Touch and Go* (1919), *David* (1925), and *Noah*, a fragment (1925?). *The Plays of D. H. Lawrence* (London: Martin Secker, 1933), contains *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd*, *Touch and Go*, and *David*. I have not been able to examine *Altitude*, published in *Laughing Horse*. *The Married Man* was published in *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, XVI, pp. 524-547, and *The Merry-Go-Round* in volume XVII of the same magazine, pp. 3-44. *Noah* can be found in *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence* (New York: Viking, 1936).

3. *Letters*, pp. 673 and 676.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

5. Catherine Carswell, *The Savage Pilgrimage* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1932), p. 253.

pose to discuss Lawrence's plays in relation to his other work, and to analyze their dramatic nature in order to show Lawrence's artistry, for better or worse, at work.

One last point before I turn to the plays themselves: they reflect a trait of Lawrence's character which has been often overlooked. Since the plays do qualify the ideas of his novels and short stories, they show that Lawrence never gave in to anything without a great deal of hedging. As Richard Aldington says, "Lawrence would not have been Lawrence if he had come at once to a clear decision and had acted upon it without hesitation," and he speaks of Lawrence's "chronic indecision and almost pathological self-mistrust."<sup>6</sup> I believe we need to examine Lawrence, not as a philosopher with a consistent system of thought, but as an artist whose ideas were continually being shaped by the demands of his art, sometimes even reversed. In his introduction to the American edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Mark Schorer writes, "Lawrence's greatness of mind shows in the necessity he felt to reject the abstraction when it would not work for the imagination."<sup>7</sup> The magnificence of Lawrence lies partly in this continuous qualification as abstractions are tested against the reality of art and life. The plays of D. H. Lawrence show this qualification in dramatic action.

## II

Lawrence's first play, *A Collier's Friday Night* (1906), may be considered as an earlier and partial version of *Sons and Lovers*. The play covers roughly the same material in the novel up to the last half of the chapter "Strife in Love." The first act presents the major conflict between Mrs. Lambert and her collier husband; the second act presents the minor conflict between mother, son, and girl; and in the third act these two conflicts are resolved as Mrs. Lambert wins out over both husband and girl.

The difference between Mr. and Mrs. Lambert is essentially the same as in the novel: she resents her husband's lower class background and her life as a collier's wife. The husband reacts to his wife's withdrawal by emphasizing the very qualities she objects to; however, the husband is not given sufficient treatment to develop his side of the domestic quarrel. Nor is the girl, Maggie, characterized carefully enough to make her correspond to Miriam of the novel. The son's awakening love for Maggie, his first act of independence from his mother, is superficially handled so that Mrs. Lambert can dismiss easily the young and helpless girl.

As an earlier version of the first parts of *Sons and Lovers*, then, A

6. Richard Aldington, *D. H. Lawrence. Portrait of a Genius But . . .* 1st Am. ed. (New York: Duell, Sloane, and Pearce, 1950), p. 284.

7. Mark Schorer, Introduction to 1st Am. edition *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (New York: Grove, 1957), p. xv.

*Collier's Friday Night* oversimplifies conflict and character, presenting the mother's viewpoint one-sidedly without honestly treating the deeper issues. The novel qualifies the attitude toward the mother and examines the nature of love much more complexly than does the play.

Lawrence's next plays were three comedies, all written in 1912: *The Married Man*, *Altitude*, and *Merry-Go-Round*. *The Married Man* is a poor play; part witty dialogue, part situation comedy, part overt statement by the author's mouthpiece, Elsa Smith. The idea of the play is that love must be honest and frank, not hidden and toyed with like a game. The plot centers around George Grainger, a married man, who is carrying on with two other women, as he tries to play at marriage while he dabbles with love. The comedy comes in when George's friend tells his girlfriends that George is married, forcing him to hide under beds and lie his way out of his philandering. Finally, Elsa Smith calls for honesty in love which she says is better than "subterfuge, bestiality, or starvation and sterility." She advises George, "Don't make trouble in the world; try to make happiness." The quick, short scenes of the play indicate that it needs further development, but it is doubtful whether anyone could make of it a successful comedy.

Like *The Married Man*, *Merry-Go-Round* needs rewriting, but Lawrence never got around to reworking these "imprompts" as he called them.<sup>8</sup> The exposition is rough and many scenes clearly need revision. The play has one good character, however. Old Mrs. Hemstock, grouchy and ill, speaks a wonderful dialect of homey images: "She melts herself into a man like butter in a hot tater. She ma'es him feel like a pearl button swimmin' away in hot vinegar." The plot is a Nottinghamshire *As You Like It*, with three pairs of lovers switching affections and partners for five acts. Harry T. Moore correctly criticizes the failure of the play: "*The Merry-Go-Round* . . . is crowded and disorganized . . . the situations often strain too hard after comic effects . . . in which most of the characters stiffly and incredibly take part."<sup>9</sup>

One of Lawrence's problems, which can be seen in *Merry-Go-Round*, was how to catch in creative language the words of love. In this play he stumbles around trying out witty dialogue, innuendo, and a touch of frankness. Only once, in Act IV, scene 1, does he create the touch of tenderness, as Rachel expresses her love for Harry in terms of her anguish over his working in the mine. But in none of the plays does Lawrence create "lovers' talk" and not until *Lady Chatterley's Lover* does he truthfully, tenderly give us love in its fullest range of sensuous response. "We have no language for the feeling," he wrote,

8. *Letters*, p. 77.

9. Harry T. Moore, *The Life and Works of D. H. Lawrence* (New York: Twayne, 1951), p. 124.

and in the plays we can see his futile attempts to create this language dramatically.

In both *The Married Man* and *The Merry-Go-Round* Lawrence tried to fuse a serious theme with a comedy of manners. The fact that he never finished his revisions of these plays would suggest that he realized how artificial they were. *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd* takes the serious element from the comedies and treats love in a working class society much more effectively and dramatically than in the earlier *A Collier's Friday Night*. Like Mrs. Lambert, Mrs. Holroyd resents her collier husband's background and occupation, but the treatment of this conflict is both more dramatic and more honest than in the earlier play. Lawrence centers the conflict on the husband and wife, leaving out the son, and achieving a dramatic tension not unlike that of his favorite play, *Riders to the Sea*.

Mr. Holroyd is so driven by his wife that he brings home two drunken tavern wenches. In a very effective scene Mrs. Holroyd desperately tries to keep some semblance of dignity and decency in the face of a drunken husband and two giggling, outspoken chippies. But she, too, is tempted to infidelity as she almost runs off with the mine electrician. The miner's mother rebukes his wife, and we see his side of the quarrel as his mother says, "You thought yourself above him, Lizzie, an' you know he's not the man to stand it . . . what man wouldn't leave a woman that allowed him to live on sufferance in the house with her, when he was bringing the money home?" At this moment news comes that Holroyd has been killed in a mine accident.

In the last scene Mrs. Holroyd washes her husband's body and speaks to the corpse, trying to absolve her sin and confess her error:

My dear, my dear—oh, my dear! I can't bear it, my dear—you shouldn't have done it. Oh—I can't bear it, for you. Why couldn't I do anything for you? The children's father—my dear—I wasn't good to you. But you shouldn't have done this to me. Oh dear, oh, dear! . . . I can't bear it. No, things aren't fair . . . a shame for you! It was a shame. But you didn't—you didn't try. I *would* have loved you—I tried hard. What a shame for you! It was so cruel for you . . . and it hurt you so! (She weeps bitterly, so her tears fall on the dead man's face; suddenly she kisses him.) My dear, my dear, what can I do for you, what can I? (She weeps as she wipes his face gently.)

Essentially this is the same plot as in the short story "Odour of Chrysanthemums;" both were written about 1913. The major difference between the two is in Lawrence's treatment of the wife. In the play, the miner triumphs in death, forcing his wife to realize her situation and her responsibilities—as they were in relation to him, and as they will be in her life without him. It is as if the dead Holroyd had

become a dark God to whom his wife offers herself in tears of atonement for killing him, that is, for destroying him in life and wishing his death. There is only a hint of this in the story where Mrs. Bates neither accepts nor realizes her guilt as she does in the play.

The Preface to *Touch and Go* (1919) is Lawrence's only stated theory of drama. Ostensibly it was written for The People's Theatre, but Lawrence is more concerned with the nature of tragedy and the specific example of tragedy found in the labor-capital strife:

Granted that men are still men, Labour *v.* Capitalism is a tragic struggle. If men are no more than implements, it is non-tragic and merely disastrous. In tragedy the man is more than his part . . . He may be killed, but the resistant, integral soul in him is not destroyed. He comes through, though he dies . . . And it is in this facing of fate, this going right through with it, that tragedy lies. Tragedy is not disaster. It is a disaster when a cart-wheel goes over a frog, but it is not tragedy. Tragedy is the working out of some immediate passional problem within the soul of man.

The difference between disaster and tragedy is expressed another way, where we see that Lawrence is thinking not only of labor vs. capitalism, but also of the war which had just ended:

If we really could know what we were fighting for, if we could deeply believe in what we were fighting for, then the struggle might have dignity, beauty, satisfaction for us. If it were a profound struggle for something that was coming to life in us, a struggle that we were convinced would bring us to a new freedom, a new life, then it would be a creative activity, a creative activity in which death is a climax in the progression towards new being. And this is tragedy.

If we could feel the tragedy in the struggle, we would know the happiness of creative suffering—a type of catharsis. *Touch and Go* is an example of a struggle which is both accidental and tragic. Using the characters from *Women in Love* (with different names), Lawrence creates a different version of Gerald Barlow, the industrial magnate. Gerald faces two problems: an impending strike at the mines he owns, and an emotional strife with Anabel, his former sweetheart.

The first of these conflicts is complicated by Gerald's family. As in the novel, Gerald's father had solved unrest among the miners by acts of Christian charity; he did what he could for the needy who came to him and sympathized with their poverty. Gerald does not repeat his father's easy patronage; he is closer to his mother who urges him to fight. Anabel has returned to Gerald after she had left him because their affair was unresolved passion, more like hate than love. She ran away with a Norwegian, but she couldn't stand the cold negation of passion with him, so she has returned to Gerald to fight out her love-hate struggle.

The final act of *Touch and Go* resolves both of Gerald's problems. His struggle with Anabel, he realizes, must be worked out from within, through a catharsis which will cleanse their hate and purify their love:

Gerald: I've known you long enough—and known myself long enough—to know I can make you nothing at all, Anabel: neither can you make me. If the happiness isn't there—well, we shall have to wait for it, like a dispensation. It probably means we shall have to hate each other a little more—I suppose hate is a real process . . . Nobody is more weary of hate than I am—and yet we can't fix our own hour, when we shall leave off hating and fighting. It has to work itself out in us. . . It's a cleansing process—like Aristotle's Katharsis. We shall hate ourselves clean at last, I suppose.

At the end of the play Gerald and Anabel marry and this conflict is resolved.

The strike solution is neither so simple nor so final—it is touch and go. Speaking of one of the old clerks, who has been at the mines since his father's day, Gerald says, "they're so self-righteous. They think I'm a sort of criminal who has instigated the new devilish system which runs everything so close and cuts it so fine—as if they hadn't made this inevitable by their shameless carelessness and wastefulness in the past." This is a different Gerald than we find in *Women in Love*, with different reasons for modernizing the mine. He realizes that mechanization is evil, but he knows it is inevitable because of what the generations before him have done. He says that he hopes the miners will strike because "If they would, I'd have some respect for them." The strike parallels the hate-love conflict between Gerald and Anabel and there is hope of resolution in both conflicts.

By the end of the play Gerald has been able to reconcile his father's and mother's points of view. He has his father's purpose and his mother's method. His father failed because he would not respect the miners as men, and his mother would simply fight with no end in sight —no love growing from hate. We feel that the solution to the strike will come as it did with Anabel, through time and creative struggle.

The differences between *Touch and Go* and *Women in Love* are enormous. Not only are the characters portrayed differently, but even more striking is Lawrence's attitude toward the industrial owner and the machine world. Here Gerald's methods are given at least favorable bias, if not affirmation. Mr. Harry T. Moore says of *Touch and Go*, "Lawrence might have done better if he had confined himself to the theme of the strike, or if he had invented a new set of characters to represent the mine owners and their friends instead of using several

people from *Women in Love* with some of the problems of the novel, irrelevant here, still clinging to them.<sup>10</sup>

I don't think we can evade the relationship between *Touch and Go* and *Women in Love* this easily. I've tried to show that the conflict with Anabel and the strike problem are related, so that the solution to the one problem defines the kind of solution possible for the other, even though the play doesn't present a definite climax to the strike issue. Furthermore, as the preface to the play suggests, it is indirectly about the war. The struggle in *Touch and Go*, the working out of the *passional* problem, is for Gerald a consummation—as the preface calls it, a tragedy.

Lawrence's letters through this period reveal a state of shock with momentary flashes of hope and, at the end of the war, a sense of release from his confinement in England and the horror of the holocaust. Speaking of *Women in Love*, he wrote, "The book frightens me: it is end-of-the-world. But it is, it must be, the beginning of a new world."<sup>11</sup> This refers to the Ursula-Birkin relationship in the novel, but it also indicates Lawrence's attitude at the end of the war. In the play Gerald and Anabel do come through and marry, and the war between Gerald and the strikers can be resolved when their mutual hatred and violence lead to catharsis, that is to mutual respect and understanding. Discussing Lawrence's attitude after the war, Mark Schorer says, "he was still fairly desperate to find some means of satisfying what he himself called his 'societal impulse' and of making his novels end positively in this world."<sup>12</sup> This impulse finds dramatic expression in the tragic catharsis of *Touch and Go*, but a different kind of expression in the later novels like *Kangaroo* and *The Plumed Serpent*.

I suggest that Lawrence, using the more limited play form, chose one problem, the strike, and made it representative of the war in order to show how such struggles might be beneficial. He was trying to find some meaning, some hope from the war. *Touch and Go* defines this meaning in dramatic terms, and this definition is quite different from that found in the novels. Later, after two trips to England in 1925 and 1926, where Lawrence was appalled at the industrial wasteland his beloved Nottingham had become, he restated his attitude to mechanization. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* requalifies *Touch and Go*, so that we might say that Clifford Chatterley is descended from Gerald Barlow as well as Gerald Crich.

Lawrence's last play *Saul* or *David* (1925) (the manuscript has *David* crossed out and *Saul* written across the top) is taken directly

10. *Ibid.*, p. 179.

11. *Letters*, p. 376.

12. Schorer, Introduction, p. xiv.

from the Old Testament, Samuel I:15-20. Like *The Plumed Serpent*, written two years earlier, *David* deals with one kind of religion supplanting another. Whereas *The Plumed Serpent* creates a new symbolic religion which returns to more primitive origins, *David* shows the decline of one kind of religious faith. But the two works complement each other. In *The Plumed Serpent* Doña Carlota says, "But man loses his connection with God. And then he can never recover it again, unless some new Saviour comes to give him his new connection. And every new connection is different from the last, though God is always God." In the play Saul has lost his connection with God (why is not clear) and David is going to establish a new connection. David's God is sometimes gods, plural and uncapitalized, but the emphasis in the play is on the decline of Saul's faith and his complex attitude, a mixture of fear, defiance, and acceptance, toward David the new prophet.

In *David* Lawrence created what the critics called a "cinematographic" technique, meaning that it is composed of sixteen short scenes rather than the conventional five-act structure. These scenes give a rapid plot movement and allow Lawrence to avoid a definite climax, which, in turn, shows the gradual, tenuous decline and replacement of God by gods. At the end of the play it is implied that David's God, in time, shall be replaced by another, as each new faith gradually succumbs to a newer one. *Noah*, which Lawrence abandoned for *David*, uses the more symbolic language of *The Plumed Serpent* and suggests that the new God Noah will bring will give man, not God, power and strength. Neither *Noah* nor *David* successfully dramatizes the tragic, but necessary, need for man to redefine and reaffirm his faith. Lawrence was unable to give them the care and scope that he lavished on *The Plumed Serpent*.

### III

I have concentrated mainly on the ideas in Lawrence's plays rather than their dramatic qualities. The plays do not stand up very well under conventional dramatic criticism. Only *Touch and Go* and *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd* show any intensity, or tension, which would give them stage possibilities. Only a few of the characters could be played well on stage, and the dialogue, especially in the comedies, is limited and frequently stilted. In short, Lawrence is not an important playwright.

But his plays do show an important part of Lawrence's vision and artistic process. They do attempt, for better or worse, to handle his ideas dramatically. If he does not create dramatic dialogue, character, or plot, he does, nevertheless, create a different art form than the novel, tale, or poem. What I mean is that Lawrence did write *plays*; he did

shape his thought to dramatic necessity. The best example of this is *Touch and Go*. It is impossible to say whether the fact that Lawrence was writing a play forced the change in his ideas about industrial England, or whether he was using the play form as a scapegoat, pouring into *Touch and Go* the reservations he felt after *Women in Love*. But *Touch and Go* is a better play than if it had been simply a watered-down version of the novel. It is more consistent in its structure and characterization and more satisfying in its conclusion. The same is true of the other plays. They are not important as drama, but they are dramatic attempts to reshape and restate the same concerns to be found in Lawrence's other work.

When the plays qualify that work, as they often do, it is for two reasons. First is Lawrence's chronic indecision. The plays are the hedgings of the other forms. He needed some art form which would allow him the chance to work over his ideas. Second, the plays are different because their dramatic nature demanded changes in ideas as well as form. Reading Lawrence's plays we see more clearly how a great artist hammered out his thought on several anvils, reshaping and redefining it to fit the specific form—novel, tale, play—to produce the work of art.

ARTHUR E. WATERMAN

## ON THE SUPERSESSION OF THE MODERN CLASSIC STYLE

We passionate followers of the "Modern Drama" may be less contemporary than we think. Our chosen subject matter may well be thoroughly Aristotelean in this sense at least—it has a beginning, a middle and an end. One of the assumptions of this essay will be that we may have seen the end of "Modern Drama" and one of my aims will be to indicate some reasons for so believing. We seem to be entering a new period of dramatic activity as different from what we can call the Modern Classic era as the Restoration is from the Elizabethan. We can take a suggestive initial text from that striking, experimental play of 1956, Nigel Dennis's *Cards of Identity*—a brilliant attack on the various modern cults of personality which Dennis satirically exposes as so many frenetic attempts to deny the clear evidence of the nature of modern life. "What makes the world in which we live today?" he has his President (a modern counterpart of Ben Jonson's Subtle, the Alchemist) ask. "Well, we hear much of something called 'the individual.' We hear much of a body vaguely named 'society.' But what *are* these, ladies and gentlemen, but ghosts—verbal vestiges, mere wisps of fantasy in the brains of deluded librarians? The world today is a world of groups." And so, of course, it is. And so, too, contemporary drama will be setting about elegizing, embalming, discrediting whoever supposes he can be an individual save in a pleasingly eccentric way. But with this assertion, I turn to my argument.

The classic heroes of the modern theater share "a uniqueness" in common; they all have seductive ways of taking themselves seriously. Thomas à Becket and Pirandello's *Henry IV* are alike capable of strange dedications, ones fanatic enough to belittle imaginatively all the rest of the world. Giraudoux makes in *Judith* and *Electra* inimitable plays out of the observed (and most unpromising) capacity of a beautiful adolescent girl to impose a passionate provincialism of the heart on larger questions and make them shrink in consequence; Anouilh's *Antigone* does the same thing more literally. Here we watch all mature political motives in the person of Creon mercilessly discredited by an untutored girl—an outrage we not only abide but find ourselves excitedly applauding. The irresistible story of St. Joan further documents my point. The best modern playwrights have badly wanted excessive, socially unabsorbable or fanatical heroes—

outsiders, and noting this, it occurs to me that perhaps major shifts in dramatic emphasis from one era to the next can be best detected in the varying quotient of sympathy afforded the exceptional hero or the heroine.

It can be said, I think, that modern drama as a recognizable *bloc* begins—with appropriate, even symbolic, ambiguity—in the complementary treatments of the exceptional man we find in Büchner's *Wozzeck* and Ibsen's *Brand*. The one treatment is wry, left-handed, minor-keyed and elicits a kind of confused pity for the marginal, schlamozel-type unhero, Wozzeck; the other is impressively serious about a man tragically dedicated to his own seriousness, a man very vocally and strenuously in search of a vocation which will carry him into the midst of life. The racking irony of *Brand* is that the very violence of Brand's need to be central, to serve, keeps him on the margin of life—isolated and outside, too proudly intransigent to be useful to LIFE, though he is brave, intelligent, eloquent. Wozzeck, on the other hand, being so prophetically insignificant, moves naturally into the center of human life as it is lived in the twentieth century. He is the forerunner of the Kafkan cipher hero, the man in whose fearful instinct for victimization we are supposed to find our identity as social units. The history of modern drama could well be written in terms of an uneasy movement between these symbolic extremes, and up and down the scale of felt seriousness towards exceptional people, as dramatist after dramatist tries to decide whether to take a Solness, a Judith, a Willy Loman, a Thomas à Becket, an Undershaft or even an Orestes at their own, history's, God's or the social machine's valuation.

On the whole, up until recently modern dramatists have supported the innovator, the separate man, the original or exceptional person against the compact and misconstruing majority; indeed, Ibsen and Strindberg not only support but themselves personify these qualities. Support, I say, to the extent that drama can support anything without losing requisite tensions. Ibsen's complex ambivalences of attitude towards Brand, Peer Gynt, Stockmann, Solness, Eilert Lövberg, and Bjorkmann set the pattern in this. The same could be said for another great pantheon of imperfect heroes, those of O'Neill. But I would insist the crucial thing is not that the greater modern dramatists have been psychologically acute enough to present the weakness as well as the strength of their heroes, but that these men and women clearly seem important to their creators—from Ibsen to Sartre the creative human will is affirmed as manifestly, factually efficacious; whether for good or evil is a question to be dramatically explored, but always these people exert force and influence events; they create a dramatic world, and estimation of their function and consequence seems to be undis-

putedly the central obligation of the serious dramatist. That there is in modern drama a Chekhovian countercurrent to this primal mode in no way destroys its descriptive centrality.

What in this essay I would like to argue is that in our own time these traditional usages of the modern drama have undergone and are undergoing a fundamental reworking. There has been a major shift in world tone in the last twenty-five years. The drama documents and defines the quality of this change. To see how this has occurred we will need a couple of framing generalizations.

There is a seminal relationship between drama and society's experiments with itself, for a living society is constantly negotiating along its intellectual borders; on these borders it encounters novelty; it listens to that small group of its members who argue the accessibility of the hitherto unimagined; above all it listens to the arguments for growth posed against society's natural policy of self-entrenchment in the known, the received, the secure.

Seen one way, dramatic literature is the record of this perennial negotiation between the questing individual and the comparatively static social mass. Even more importantly, drama discloses the contest between the morally stubborn individual and the drifting society—such a situation, say, as Hamlet's, where he is outside the society less because he has moved away from it into new realms of speculative life, than because *it* has moved away from *him* into irresponsibility—a society now steered by the tyrannical hand of the murderer King Claudius. The situation of Antigone—her higher obstinacy—is the same. In these crucial negotiations, let me add at once, the individual is neither always safe nor always right; the price of his obstinacy is often social disgrace, outlawry or death. The possibility of tragic defeat is a constant in the good society as men know it. What dramatic art demands is resistance, not successful righteousness. Few truly serious plays can have the redeeming epilogue of *Job*.

Our own time, almost to the immediate present, has been a time of cataclysmic change, and consequently this dramatic negotiation between society and the individual has been particularly intense. Indeed, the great characteristic, explanatory philosophies of our time have been dramatic ones based on a sharp sense that history, that personal life, that the very qualities of the mind are best discussed in terms of struggle between alien but co-existent forces. The Marxist analysis, based as it is on the historically observed war between the classes, grows fantastic only when it abandons its own terms in order to speak of a time when this contest shall cease and a classless, non-dramatic society will result. Freudian psychology is based on the firm perception that civilization is the costly, if valuable, result of a con-

stant conflict between heart's desire and the resistant forces of order. For Freud, this conflict was not something of which humanity could be cured; it was the tragic stuff of human life. The most interesting Existentialist arguments present the re-encounter of the lonely individual and the society which he, by his own choice, seeks to rejoin; but the individual is never anything but restive in this alliance. For the sacrificial Existentialist hero, like Orestes in Sartre's *The Flies*, does not come to rest in society; he can minister to it like a God accepting the limiting fact of incarnation, but he is qualitatively opposite to it. Since until very recently the key philosophies of our time have been shaped on this acknowledgement of the necessary and unresolved contest at the heart of life, it is not surprising to find that modern literature has been intensely dramatic. The novels of James, of Thomas Mann, of Dostoevsky and Conrad and Faulkner must be joined with the formal dramatists in the memorable statement of this fact. It is because this tension, this excitement, this sense of productive strife, has been so diminished in our present life and literature that I think we can legitimately think of our time as epochal. That is, if one believes at all in the notion of historical epochs, it is epochal, and we have entered a new one.

There is a clear continuum from Rousseau to Hitler, from Byron to Hemingway, from Sir Walter Scott to William Faulkner. In all these figures art has been expended to help us to take the suffering individual seriously, to attend to his lyric protests, to believe in the face of violently amassed evidence that he makes the kind of difference he passionately contends he does. We can now isolate a period artistically inaugurated by the gigantic, Janus-like inclusiveness and vigor of Goethe and Beethoven and closed by the gigantic elegiac talents of Proust, Yeats, and Thomas Mann. One could say further that, along with its initial and terminal masters, it has had its symptomatic casualties of divided and dispersed genius in figures like Coleridge and Hölderlin at the beginning and Gide and Picasso at the end. These latter artists shared with the expressionist dramatists, with our O'Neill and with Pirandello, a sentence to work in the marches between a dying dispensation which no longer sustained them and a problematic new one growing with surrealistic unpredictability amid the rubble of ideologies. In short, they and we have been the harried witnesses to the conclusion of the Romantic era—a very great one for drama. It has an ending marked by wars of fantastic Mephistophelean power, by death wishes, by economic collapse, by ideological disappointment, by exhausted moral sanctions, all to the accompaniment of a Wagnerian upsurging of unacknowledged feelings. That Ibsen faced this most squarely and found an adequate dramatic mold

for it in *The Master Builder* is part of his claim to be the greatest of modern dramatists. For we can see that he and others like Strindberg and Tolstoi sought to do the essentially dramatic thing: they tried to find presentational means at once to acknowledge and to contain artistically the fact and the power of the *irrational*. This is a more heroic enterprise than most men can sustain, and I think there are evident dramatic consequences of the fact that just now society has won temporarily in the healthy, dynamic struggle between the individual and the gravitationally persuasive social mass; but this expensive victory was not achieved in a minute and the literature of the 100 years from Stendhal to Mann records the systematic extermination of an older order and of its passionately waged defense. We can see how artists like Ibsen did what they could to furnish the human arguments for the preservation of the liberal humanitarian tradition and, at the same time, led the attack against it by cutting away its root illusions, or by describing its maladies so convincingly that liberal society, made aware of the extent of its sickness, concurred by dying. A rereading of Strindberg's *Dream Play* at this point will leave one sure he has watched the harrowing death struggle of a self-stifled social order. A similar, if more complex argument could be derived from Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken*.

But I don't want to write further of these modern classics now, for our concern is with the almost contemporary plays in which we can discern a moving away from this modern classic style. I have chosen from many possibilities *four* quite recent plays for analytical comment, one each by a German, a French, an American and an English author. Though not obvious choices, they are not eccentric products of marginal visions. Each refracts the essential development in terms of a recognizably national style, or theatrical sensibility; all are called forth by the historical death and birth of which I've been speaking. In every case the protagonist's ambiguous quality is defined by his persistent effort to escape irrelevance, to avoid rejection in the rapid movement of public or private history. Whether he be the young O'Neill or an aging British professional man, he refuses to use his imagination to *realize* change. He resists change where the classical modern heroes initiated and coerced others into it. His stubbornness is at once his dignity and limitation, for though he plays with tragic intensity he relates too imperfectly to his dramatic environment for his presented *Erlebnis* to be tragic. For it seems an axiom of drama that if the hero is too definitely outside the social order the tragic vision is divided and diffused. He must either be the sustainer or the creative revolutionary, not merely the disregard or the victim. The hero has been transformed into his false cognate, the "outsider."

Let us start with the simple initial situation of the German play, Wolfgang Borchert's *The Man Outside* (1946-47). This play, by an honest, passionate writer who died at the age of twenty-six of war wounds, lovelessness and despair, of which his terminal tuberculosis was the perfect objective expression, is the kind of heightened autobiography which is, surely, the proper genre of despair. I do not plan to analyze it; I merely want to tell its opening: a twenty-two-year-old soldier returns from the Russian Front with a crippling wound in his knee and finds his wife with another man; his little son (whom he has never seen and is never to see) lies buried somewhere under the waste of rubble; his parents—in despair of his return—are dead in a suicide pact. He slips into the River Elbe to die but is too weak and awkward to avoid being thrown up on the bank by the capricious current; he is too damaged even to manage his own death. An old man sits weeping on the bank, helpless and disregarded, his feeble lamentations drowned out by the rumble of the time. The old man is God; He, too, is outside. He, too, goes unheard; His hand directs nothing. To be an outsider is to be thus declared superfluous, to be denied one's proper function. This enforced sense of historical redundancy is both the symptom of a time of extreme change and the cause of the outsider's stunned or angry uncertainty.

Here, slightly enhanced by romanticized self-pity, is an image of the outsider which we cannot explain away. It is precisely human to feel the way Borchert *here* feels—lost, desperate and tired. Most clearly, we know that because man is a creature who can remember the happiness of "Insideness," he can be made desolate in this special way. The risk we run by knowing life, by experiencing patriotism, by embracing social ideals, is that *we must know their loss in time*. The tragic protagonist is made an "outsider" when the role he has traditionally played supports those things which the community has ceased to care about, or to nurture—a community which has sustained and partly formed the tragic protagonist. Outsiders tend to be people whose memories are too long, people who are too inflexible, people who care too much to accommodate themselves fluently to the shifting currents of change. They are encumbered by what they suppose to be their humanity or, less sympathetically, by what they take to be the indispensability of what they "stand for" to mankind. They are, like Hamlet, unwilling or unable to forget the *substance* of the order that made them; unlike him in lacking the brilliance and power to resist creatively. The fact that they must be rejected suggests that a new definition of humanity is emerging. For we know that their inflexibility is an embarrassment to society, and much drama is an expression of the difficulty society has either getting along *with or without* such

people. Society needs, but resents, people who are unrelentingly purposive in the tradition of Socrates, and people who, like Antigone, are relentlessly loyal to the professed higher ideals of the culture. The strange, first play by the late French Existentialist novelist and playwright, Albert Camus, is about such difficulties and can help us extend our enquiry. The play is *Caligula* (1938).

It is about the reign of the cruellest of all the Roman emperors who, in a short rule of four years, transgressed every law and scorned every symptom of human kindness. He killed, raped, frolicked and betrayed while he commented—"What I admire most about myself is my imperturbability." He was not so weak as to be moved by the spectacle of human suffering. Out of this undifferentiated chronicle of lust and cruelty, Camus makes a strangely quiet, meaningful play—one in which the behavior of Caligula, though never sentimentalized, becomes a subject for a kind of bedazzled pity and terror. There are two things in the play that I want to bring forward. The first, the characterization of Caligula, presents a searching, patient view of the metaphysically alienated kind of outsider—the man sickened to the heart by the ineffaceable spectacle of human vulnerability and helplessness; the second, the dramatized experience of Caligula's corrupting of the young poet, Scipio, which raises another question and can form a bridge to our discussion of O'Neill's posthumous autobiographical play, *Long Day's Journey into Night*. But, to the first point.

Caligula, as the play opens, has fled through the fields for three days and nights trying to escape the fact of his sister's death. He has loved her; he is already emperor; he is twenty-five years old. He returns to the palace, and announces what he now *knows*: "that love is nothing, nothing," "That men die, and they are unhappy" and that everything is equally important or unimportant—in short, for him the whole scale of values has collapsed. Though searing, this is a common enough experience for men; when they are deeply hurt they lie still, weep, accept what consolation they can from friends and from nature and time until the contours of a saner reality are restored. But Caligula does not attempt to return to any happier state. He is convinced by the depth and magnitude of his experience that this sense of the annihilation of meaning is total reality. He sets about to use his power as Roman emperor to make the remainder of life coherent with this time of negation. He says, "What's the use to me of the . . . amazing power that's mine . . . if I can't reduce the sum of suffering and make an end to death? . . . it's all one whether I sleep or keep awake, if I have no power to tamper with the scheme of things." He sets out, then, with all the wild, lucid energy of a desperate will, to force men (in his own awful words) "to live by the light of the truth," the truth

being that, given power and cruelty enough, he can murder the illusions of morality itself, discredit heroism, and ultimately destroy innocence and the possibility of meaning. Any time a normal sentiment of affection, confidence, or healthy reliance threatens the integrity of his resentment against a nature so calmly indifferent to his lost love, he offends or liquidates the person who might otherwise interfere with his perfect argument for the senselessness of things. The movement of the play, by presenting things mainly from Caligula's own strained but un hysterical viewpoint, makes us more interested in the logical perfection of his estrangement than in any feeling of moral outrage against his cruelty. More and more one realizes that either the world is a place in which love means something, or Caligula is right—for his logic is sound enough.

The metaphysical outsider is a man so outraged by human limitation in the face of an apparently indifferent cosmos that he forgets that one part of nature—I mean other human beings—is not indifferent, and, forgetting this, he misidentifies himself, through a mad, though understandable, desire for the invulnerability and indifference of the inanimate heavens. He identifies, then, with the wrong part of nature, for in a special way he decides that only by being a dead machine can he "live" in a dead machine-like universe. He makes the very mistake Carlyle prophetically seeks to correct at the beginning of the romantic era in *Sartor Resartus*. He kills pity in himself and murders love. But it is absurd; man can, we know all too well, be a good hater, but he has a poor aptitude for indifference.

The second point to be made is concerned with the deliberate corruption of the sensitive, forthright, seventeen-year-old poet, Scipio, whose combination of idealism and intelligence makes him understand Caligula so well that the latter fears his human magnetism. Caligula orders the boy's father wantonly killed, an act so unmotivatedly cruel that he thinks the boy's understanding will be outstripped by it. But it does not work. The boy looks at the man and understands his act; he cannot hate him. "I share his pain. I understand all, that is my trouble," the boy says. But with the advent of this undifferentiated tolerance, all his ideals perish, all his passions, and all his splendid, youthful intolerance of the false. It is this rape of innocence that prompts Cherea, a good man of unheroic fairness and warmth, finally to assassinate Caligula for, as he says, "he has taught . . . despair. And to have instilled despair into a young heart is fouler than the foulest of the crimes he has committed up to now." Cherea is moved to act by the knowledge of one terrible thing; Caligula, in his own emptiness and desperation, could not co-exist with the fact of innocence joined to intelligence and love in the person of Scipio. They

reminded him unbearably of himself before the loss of faith in things. Caligula was compelled to make an outsider of Scipio, too.

*Caligula* is built around a protagonist sick of his own humanity; drama has reached a dead-end of excess. Camus himself has found no dramatically viable road forward from it. The kind of suffering that Scipio undergoes is incidental to Camus' play, but it is central to O'Neill's best play, the great autobiographical drama, *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, where O'Neill's life-long search for a dramatic structure sturdy enough to contain his own passionate sense of differentness culminates successfully in a masterfully imaginative witness to facts.

This play, as is well-known, dramatizes one day from the lives of the O'Neill family, called the Tyrones in the play. The time is August, 1912. Edmund, the son who most represents O'Neill, is twenty-three years old. Written with determined honesty, the play carries us slowly into the almost unspeakable actualities of the Tyrones' family life. On this day, as if drawn by inaudible music, Mrs. Tyrone slips, after pathetically futile attempts at subterfuge, back into her dope addiction. We are compelled to share the mute, helpless apprehension of the husband and two sons who at the same time love her, dread her departure into the inaccessible world of her narcotic withdrawal and—as we cannot help but see from their vain and awkward attempts to reach out to her—are themselves partly the cause of her isolation and fear. It is this day, too, that young Edmund finds that he has tuberculosis and that his sixty-five-year-old father, who was the most promising Shakespearean actor of his generation, forgoes his own key illusion to confess the fact that he sold out his art for the money which he could not help but make from his all-time commercial success in the *Count of Monte Cristo*. It is this day that young Edmund is forced to realize that his brother ten years his senior, who has always stood by him and tried to sponsor his entry into a man's life, has turned into a sloppy, lachrymose alcoholic, a patron of fat, earth-mother whores, and that this weakly, cynical, wasted man hates his younger brother since complications attending his birth occasioned their mother's first addiction to morphine.

They all love the beautiful, ineffectual mother, but their sentimental, greedy Irish longing for understanding makes her delicate responses inadequate to their passionate demands. The almost unbearable reality which rises up at us out of the play's slow, inexorable movement is that these weak but gifted, these warm-hearted but selfish people, these aspiring but fearful people are helpless alone and they are helpless together, because they are rooted in the necessities of humanity. They *want* to love each other. It is terrible and real, but

to watch the idealistic, angry youth, Edmund, trying to improvise something to fill the never-to-be-appeased void at the center of things—to watch him being forced step by convincing step away from sustaining beliefs or sources of comfort—to watch the *rebirth* of O'Neill as an outsider debarred from a sense of the possible communion of man, is almost too saddening to watch. And yet we must. The play is fundamentally elegiac and renders a comment too embracing in its interdiction of hope to be tragic in the classical sense; all the four people in the play are so absorbed in their own concerns that we sense in them only the *lachrymae rerum*. O'Neill, longing for heroism, finally acknowledges a world in which there is none.

Sometimes, as Sartre puts it in *The Flies*, "human life begins on the far side of despair." Sometimes one must learn how thoroughly outside of normal life we can be forced before we recognize how much we need to do to return to shared life. I take part of the intention of the last play I will discuss, Angus Wilson's *Mulberry Bush*, to be just in this sense diagnostic. He wants, properly I think, to show just how thoroughly pain, habit, and self-congratulation can close the economy of the heart, though as a sophisticated product of the English tradition, he stages his enquiry not in the sufferings of the young but in the rigidities of the old.

Angus Wilson is one of the most intelligent people to come along in English writing for some time. His short stories and novels are distinguished by an immense literacy, an exact knowledge of manner and argument, and an almost objectionable precision of language. His only play, *The Mulberry Bush* (1956), presents the theme of the gifted outsider grounded in the English tradition of high thinking and public service. James and Rose Padley are upper-middle-class intellectuals in their seventies. He is the retiring Warden of his college and a distinguished historian; she is a famous liberal social worker—a formidable source of beneficent energy and domineering will, the habitual manager of the lives of others in the name of freedom. The nearly simultaneous events of the death of their famous son, Robert (who has been a great emancipator of the public conscience from the bugaboos of Victorian prudery), and James' own retirement from the Wardenship, occasion the assembling of the family. The subsequent discussions of the past and future which arise from such times of relocation provide the action of the play. Thus the play is Chekhovian in situation—it studies the process of sociological death through close attention to the responses of people to others and to themselves when they must leave the place where they have been rooted, sheltered and shaded from the truth by the great, self-involved growth of their family's and their class's proud tradition, symbolized in the mulberry tree of the

title. The tone is not Chekhovian though. There is nothing tolerant about it; the scenes are not permitted to compose enough to elicit even passing nostalgia; and above all, unlike Chekhov's characters who have too few arguable opinions and who apparently pay almost no attention to each other, most of these characters have the lifelong habit of listening and of being listened to, and, in consequence, of speaking to hurt. The play reflects the necessary rejection of what is moribund in the systematically enlightened liberal tradition of the Protestant ruling class through the gradual deflation of the elder Padleys, and the exposure of their naively well-intentioned tyranny over the lives of their children, grandchildren and all the poor waifs and strays they have bullied with their enlightened charities.

It is not a pleasant play, but still, on the whole, it is a creatively disposed, even an optimistic work, for it argues that the future belongs to those who have the humility to know that personal affairs, above all, human love, are *not* things which we can simply *decide* about and then turn to other work. It argues that a generalized fairmindedness about mankind is not enough, since it begs all the harder questions of affection and intimacy. The movement of the play carries the Padleys from their recognized position as the only real *insiders*, the only really informed and undeluded members of society, to a position of substantial irrelevance—that of unheeded *outsiders*, not because what they have stood for (decency, honesty, justice and cleanliness) is not worthwhile, but because they equated *themselves* to *causes* and believed too much in their indispensability as the housekeepers of society.

At the end of the play they are outside because they lack the habit of liking people or things save on their own terms and are now unable or unwilling to learn it. In the end they cannot even draw together in their loneliness. James Padley goes off to America and Rose goes to London to work on some prison bill or other.

Angus Wilson has, I think, meant us to see a kind of obituary acted out. In its quieter, more oblique way, the play is as extreme as the ones before. The rejection of the Padleys and of Padleyism is not requested but is merely presented as a faithful recognition of historical fact. The Padleys were never inconsiderable; they worked, they chose, and they held well enough to themselves to have been left outside. Their abandoned, disenchanted situation at the end is exactly desperate.

I suppose we have had enough crisis, enough despair. The literature of "extreme situation" has perhaps summed itself up so well that by its very perfection it has rendered itself obsolete. Perhaps, too, it is time to admit that we are no longer willing to think of our condition as tragic; that in our present, well-padded, acquisitive national ex-

istences we find it harder and harder to imagine that life is, on the whole, a restless, unending, and unendable contest between emergent human desire and the inertia of the environment we and our fathers have shaped and are being shaped by. We—in the present climate of profligate insouciance, of vast care over trifles but a peculiar casualness about larger issues—feel obliged to end the annoying uncertainties of conflict by hopping to the side of society. We want badly to say either that all the things we are can be explained by social psychology, or that, since nothing we do *can* be so explained, falling back on the perennial skeptical solution (a kind of faith that holds nothing in the realm of the mind as certain), we can at least retain what we have and defend the *status quo* against the now-to-be-feared ravages of demon change. We tend thus to contract the spectrum of complex, human virtues into a narrow span of loyalties to supposedly fixed principles and to supposedly self-evident folkways abstracted from the mutilated remains of a past we do not wish to live with but cannot completely deny. We also thereby shrink the possibilities of art. The spectral theatrical musings of Samuel Beckett make me even more certain I'm right; we are sitting at the death bed of the Modern Drama.

R. J. KAUFMANN

## THE LYRIC AND THE PHILOSOPHIC IN YEATS' CALVARY

WHILE THE greatness of William Butler Yeats as a poet is seldom disputed today, his position as a playwright is more open to question. Despite enthusiastic acclaim of his dramatic technique by Archibald MacLeish and Eric Bentley, Yeats' plays are little performed in this country outside of the universities. Actually, Yeats himself was well aware of certain qualities which he purposefully built into his plays and which he knew would diminish the chances of their success on the conventional, commercial stage. One such quality is, of course, their poetic diction and construction, although it would be unfair to imply that the connection between his poetry and his drama is that simple. For it is fairly obvious, in retrospect, that Yeats' immersion in the drama, beginning slightly before the turn of the century, was at first perhaps a symptom of his desire to alter his style and later a cause of the change toward a more colloquial diction in his poetry. This influence of dramatic technique on poetry has been well demonstrated by Thomas Parkinson in his study, *W. B. Yeats, Self-Critic* (1951).

The difference between Yeats' earlier and later poems does not, however, lie merely in an improved technique. Yeats was the kind of writer who needed a philosophic system; and beginning in 1917 he gradually came into possession of one. The first fruit of that system was included in his *Plays and Controversies* (1923). *Calvary*, the last of "Four Plays for Dancers" in that volume, was probably written between *The Only Jealousy of Emer* (finished in 1918) and the preface to the plays (dated July, 1920).

In a note to *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, Yeats described the kind of drama that he was writing: ". . . intended for some fifty people in a drawing room or a studio," it could "only fully succeed in a civilization very unlike ours." Ideally plays of this sort "should be written for some country where all classes share in a half-mythological, half-philosophical folk-belief which the writer and his small audience lift into a new subtlety." Not only had Yeats long wished for such beliefs, but, he concluded, "I have now found all the mythology and philosophy I need."<sup>1</sup>

What Yeats had found was published two years later in *A Vision*.

1. I do not mean to imply that the mythology which Yeats had found was totally responsible for the form of these plays. He had been influenced by Gordon Craig and the Japanese Nô drama, to which he had been introduced by Ezra Pound. See Chapter XIV of Richard Ellman's biography, *Yeats, The Man and the Masks* (1948).

He had made the discovery, four days after his marriage in 1917, that his wife, the former Georgie Hyde-Lees, could act as a medium through automatic writing. From this source Yeats received a very complicated theory of history, personality, and the soul. The theory was based on a Platonic dualism, replete with what he called the Great Memory, a storehouse of archetypal images occasionally available to finite minds, if they are guided by appropriate symbols and rituals. We can therefore understand why he would "desire a mysterious art, . . . doing its work by suggestion, not by direct statement, a complexity of rhythm, colour, gesture, not space-pervading like intellect but a memory and a prophecy." What he was after in fact was "not a theatre, but the theatre's anti-self," a subjective rather than an objective art.

In addition to providing him with an aesthetic, Yeats' philosophy often determined the ideas which he embodied in his plays. As a result, Yeats was able to harmonize content and technique, as the dancer sways to the dance. The sad, dreamy poetry of his youth had this same harmony, of course, and it too aimed to "work by suggestion." But by means of his direct line to the spirit world, Yeats gained a "mythology and philosophy" which gave to his later work the important qualities of precision and continuity, and made it more worldly, self-assured, and convincing than the earlier often was. In the following analysis I shall try to illustrate how the suggestions which we find in *Calvary* have behind them not only points which we can feel instinctively if we see the play or read it carefully, but a philosophic theme in terms of Yeats' system. The result is a lyric compression and a tension of ideas which is characteristic of his art.

*Calvary* begins, as do the other "Plays for Dancers," with three musicians who unfold and then fold a cloth, the while "singing and moving rhythmically." Their song is about an entranced heron standing in a stream under the moonlight. After each of three stanzas about the bird, one of the musicians repeats, "God has not died for the white heron." When they finish, another of the musicians tells of Christ at Calvary. Christ enters, and the musician tells of the mob's gibes at Him and sings a song connecting these mockings with the heron.

Lazarus then enters and repudiates Christ, saying that he has always wished only to be alone, either in the grave or in some other solitude. When he leaves, the musician describes the coming of the three Marys and Martha, and sings a song about them and the heron. Soon Judas enters. He, too, repudiates Christ and tells how he has asserted his free will by selling Him and how Christ "cannot even save me." Although Christ tells him to go, he stands behind and holds up the cross as three Roman soldiers enter.

They talk among themselves and then to Christ. Finally they dance the dance of the dice-throwers for Christ's benefit (and His clothing). At this Christ utters his last words, "My father, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" The play closes with another song by the musicians—this time about three different birds, each of which appears self-sufficient. A refrain is sung after each stanza and ends the play: "God has not appeared to the birds."

On its simplest level *Calvary* can be taken as a somewhat unorthodox explanation of Christ's last words. Yeats, it appears, believed that there was a genuine reason for them in terms of Christ's life. Such an interpretation would obviously have to include the actions of Judas and the soldiers, but what about the presence of Lazarus? What dramatic justification had Yeats for violating Biblical history? The answer is not hard to find: we need not, I think, consciously link Lazarus with Judas to realize that both (like the soldiers) are beyond the pale of Christ's moral world. In addition, Lazarus wants to be solitary, and Judas was all alone except for a heron on a nearby stream when he decided to sell Christ. The musicians tell us first that "God has not died for the white heron" and at last that it is to the solitary, self-sufficient birds that God has *not* appeared. If, therefore we have half an eye open for figurative meanings, it is not difficult to decide that a heron (or any lonely bird) stands for the solitary individual. But we can let Yeats speak for himself. In the notes to the play he says, "I have used my bird-symbolism in these songs to increase the objective loneliness of Christ by contrasting it with a loneliness . . . sufficient to itself."

While Lazarus and Judas are what Yeats calls subjective men, Christ is an objective man; and "objective men, however personally alone are never alone in their thought, which . . . always seeks the welfare of some cause or institution." Thus Christ "only pitied those whose suffering is rooted . . . in the common lot." And Yeats "represented in Lazarus and Judas types of that intellectual despair that lay beyond His sympathy." Because they are subjective men and seek "always that which is unique and personal," they cannot understand what Christ represents. But the conflict in the play is not simply between objective and subjective men. It is also between the objectivity of Christ, who is devoted to bringing man's soul to God, and that of the Roman soldiers, who represent "a form of objectivity that lay beyond His help." In attempting to develop a scheme which would explain history in terms of a conflict of forces, Yeats was forced to expand and subdivide his principles so that they might include at least the important movements of man's complicated past. While the result may still not convince us that Yeats had the answer to history, his system

did provide him with principles eminently adapted to artistic structure. When, in the first excitement over his wife's automatic writing, Yeats "offered to spend what remained of life explaining" it, "the communicators" told him, "No, . . . we have come to give you metaphors for poetry" (*A Vision*, p. 8).

We should not, therefore, be surprised to find in the last section of the notes to *Calvary*, another set of oppositions which are relevant to an understanding of the play. Yeats wrote of an Arab votary who divides "all things into Chance and Choice." This division exists in God, too, "for if . . . not He would not have freedom, He would be bound by His own choice." Some people, the votary continues, "worship His Choice; that is easy;" it is pleasant to know "that He has willed for some unknown purpose all that happens." But, says the votary, he worships His Chance; because "that moment when I understand His Chance is the moment when I am nearest Him."

In a different way from the Arab, Judas understands God's Chance. That is, he has made the choice his own, for God had not pre-ordained "I should do it, I the man Judas, born on such a day," etc. Christ, on the other hand, worships God's choice. He says to Lazarus, "I do my Father's will." One of the soldiers has an interesting comment to make on the subject. He says that if Christ "were but the God of the dice He'd know" the dance of the dice, "but he is not that God." The relation of this comment to God as chance is indicated by an analogy which Yeats put into the mouth of his Arab votary: "If I should throw the dice box, there would be but six possible sides on each of the dice, but when God throws He uses dice that have all numbers and sides." Christ represents and believes in the choice of God; Judas and Lazarus are interested in God as chance because their freedom lies in precisely that area where He does not choose to assert himself. And the soldiers are also guided by God's chance; not as with Judas to assert their individuality, but giving their will up to it much as Christ does to choice.

So far I have tried to indicate that the conflicts and theme of the play are fairly clear in general outline and are backed up by a theory in which the characters stand as symbolic forces. But in the songs, which at first seem unrelated to the action, we will find a meaning at once less obvious and more complicated. As Yeats said in the notes to the play, some of its meaning "cannot be explained fully till I have published some part at any rate of those papers . . . over which I have now spent several years." The papers grew into *A Vision*, the first edition of which appeared in 1925, two years after the publication of *Calvary*.

The first song deals wholly with the white heron.

Motionless under the moon-beam,  
Up to his feathers in the stream;  
Although fish leap, the white heron  
Shivers in a dumbfounded dream.

God has not died for the white heron.

Although half famished he'll not dare  
Dip or do anything but stare  
Upon the glittering image of a heron  
That now is lost and now is there.

God has not died for the white heron.

But that the full is shortly gone  
And after that is crescent moon,  
It's certain that the moon-crazed heron  
Would be but fishes' diet soon.

God has not died for the white heron.

We already know that the heron is a symbol of subjectivity and that Christ (Who stands for God in this case) cannot reach those who are subjective. The important points in the verses are that the bird is in a dream (the first stanza), that it is lost in contemplating its image (to the exclusion of reality—the fishes—stanza two), and that as the moon wanes from the full the heron will be saved from death (in the last stanza). The key to these stanzas lies in Yeats' Great Wheel, on which he projected the states of objectivity (primary phases) and subjectivity (antithetical phases) in personality and history. Phase fifteen of this wheel was the full moon, standing for complete subjectivity, a phase in which no human personality exists. Here "contemplation and desire, united into one, inhabit a world where every beloved image has bodily form." And "as all effort has ceased, all thought has become image;" the soul is in an "immovable trance." Finally, "all that the being has experienced as thought is visible to its eyes as a whole."<sup>2</sup> This, of course, explains why the heron is in a "dumbfounded dream," and why it does not eat. As the last stanza suggests, when the moon wanes from the full, objective qualities enter in and more attention is paid to the outside world. Such a change depends, however, on the individual's being in the same phase as his

2. *A Vision*, revised edition (1937). This particular section was finished in 1922 and subsequently suffered practically no revision.

time. When he is "out of phase" the question becomes, as we shall see, even more complicated.

There are two songs in the body of the play. The first is sung as a commentary on the crowd's gibes at Christ.

Oh, but the mockers' cry  
Makes my heart afraid,  
As though a flute of bone  
Taken from a heron's thigh,  
A heron crazed by the moon  
Were cleverly, softly played.

Then one of the crowd says, "Call on your father now before your bones have been picked clean by the great desert birds." The birds are again symbols of the subjective, arraigned against Christ in a kind of nightmare. Yeats mentions that at the fifteenth phase "Chance and Choices" are "interchangeable." Although Christ does His Father's will (believing in the determination of God's choice), his death is also brought about by Judas' action (in taking advantage of the chance in God's universe).

The second song in the play occurs after the four women have left Christ.

Take but His love away  
Their love becomes a feather  
Of eagle, swan or gull,  
Or a drowned heron's feather  
Tossed hither and thither  
Upon the bitter spray  
And the moon at the full.

This song seems to say that, without Christ's love, the love of the women would have nothing on which to fasten. Their objective natures need an external unity rather than the internal unity demanded by the subjective phase of history through which they are living. For the moon is described as being full here, as in the song about the heron, and the opposition of this subjective time to Christ's objective nature is important. Even before Calvary He had been going through a period of strain and temptation. Yeats says, concerning one possibility of phase fifteen:

Where the being has lived out of phase, seeking to live through *antithetical* [subjective] phases as though they had been *primary* [objective], there is now terror of solitude, its forced, painful and slow acceptance, and a life haunted by terrible dreams. Even for the most perfect, there is a time of pain, a passage through a

vision, where evil reveals itself in its final meaning. In this passage, Christ it is said, mourned. . . . (*A Vision*, p. 136)

What vision is Christ living through? The words of the musician at the beginning of the play are, "Christ dreams his passion through. He climbs up hither but as a dreamer," etc. Although he is an objective man living through a subjective time, he still acts as if it were not concerned only with itself. It is no wonder that He asks why He has been forsaken. At the last moment of His life He has been confronted with two personifications of His antithesis, and haunted by "terrible dreams" in the persons of the mockers and the soldiers. He had then suffered "a time of pain" through His "vision." That vision is Calvary.

ELLIOTT B. GOSE, JR.

## DIRECTING *SUMMER AND SMOKE*: AN EXISTENTIALIST APPROACH

THE MODERN AMERICAN PLAY, unlike its Continental cousins and the classics, is usually a direct slice of life with a central plot line, uncomplicated characters, and a purpose to tell a story or entertain. However, a play occasionally appears on the scene which defies the pattern. Such a play is Tennessee Williams' *Summer and Smoke*. This nonconformity may at the same time challenge and confound the director who is saddled with the task of getting to the marrow of the playwright's meaning. He must discover the "spine" of the play, that central action which clarifies and embraces all elements of the drama, making of the myriad pieces a compact whole. The problem is summed up by Harold Clurman: "It is the function of the director of a play as subtly difficult as 'Summer and Smoke' to articulate a coherent interpretation which the audience can actually *see*."<sup>1</sup>

Upon initial reading of the play, one finds it talky and too full of obvious symbolism, but on the whole it is a moving story of an idealistic girl who loves a sensual boy. The framework of the play is neatly balanced with characters representing either Alma's way of life or John's. Even the scenic elements are carefully apportioned; the rectory stage right, the doctor's office stage left, with the expanse of sky and the angel named Eternity forming a link between them. In the course of the action the characters change places; Alma surrenders her moral principles and picks up a travelling salesman while John paradoxically gains respectability. The director is moved by the play and sees clearly his approach. But, as we know, between the conception and the production the shadow often falls.

For the director creation begins when he and the actors lift the play from the printed page and put it "on its feet." He must concern himself with flesh and blood characters who feel deeply, react believably and move through space. Almost at once the easy balance of *Summer and Smoke* crumbles away, and the initial clarity becomes shot through with complexities. Questions arise: If Alma is the detached symbol of "spirit," why does John's touch physically excite her? Why does she tell Dr. John, "I'm not a cold person"?<sup>2</sup> If John is the champion of "body hunger," why is he so miserable wallowing in sensuality? Why is he attracted to Alma, gently assuring her, "You have a lot of feeling

1. Harold Clurman, (review), *New Republic* (October 25, 1948), p. 26.

2. All quotes from the play appearing in this study are taken from the acting edition of Tennessee Williams' *Summer and Smoke* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1948).

in your heart, and that's a rare thing these days"? If the play is so perfectly balanced, why does Alma emerge as an infinitely more interesting character than John? Why does Alma make a complete about face, from white to black, while John merely moves from black to gray? Why is Alma not greatly upset when John refuses her offer of herself? If Alma has really changed into a streetwalker, why is there little hint of it in her lines to the travelling salesman? Why is the salesman pictured as a self-conscious and uncertain young man if this is Alma's first step on the primrose path?

Seeking an answer one turns to two sources; the playwright and the critics. When asked what his play was about, Mr. Williams replied, "I have never been able to say what was the theme of my plays and I don't think I have ever been conscious of writing with a theme in mind. . . . Usually when asked about a theme, I look vague and say, 'It is a play about life.'"<sup>3</sup> The critics each saw something different in the play. The following may suffice to show their reactions:

. . . the twin themes of his tone poem are clearly stated: spirit and flesh, order and anarchy.<sup>4</sup>

The prim maiden succeeds in saving him [John] and losing herself.<sup>5</sup>

Miss Alma does not go off the deep end until the heartlessness of the life around her pushes her off . . .<sup>6</sup>

One of the springs of Williams' inspiration is his fascination with the opposition between the old Adam which tends to keep us mired in a kind of primitive inertia, and our impulse to transcend it.<sup>7</sup>

"Gentility" is the only form of idealism or spirituality accessible to her; perhaps, Mr. Williams seems to be saying [it is] the only form now accessible to anyone, and our culture is ugly just because we have no living equivalent for what is by now a mere quaint anachronism.<sup>8</sup>

. . . the play . . . really has nothing especially interesting to say, and says it in a strangely cloudy and adolescent way . . .<sup>9</sup>

None of these interpretations answers fully all of the questions pursuing the director. One thing, however, becomes increasingly certain; the ordinary moral approach is not the correct yardstick to apply to this play, for it presupposes a good and evil interpretation of the characters and events. Not only does this jar with the delicate tone of the play, but heroes and villains simply do not exist in *Glorious Hill*. Though a preacher's daughter, Alma's concern with John's excesses is

3. Tennessee Williams, "Questions Without Answers," *New York Times* (October 3, 1948), Sec. 2, pp. 1, 3.

4. Brooks Atkinson, (review), *New York Times* (October 7, 1948), p. 33.

5. John Rosenfeld, (review), *New York Times* (July 9, 1947), p. 18.

6. Brooks Atkinson, (review), *New York Times* (April 25, 1952), p. 19.

7. Harold Clurman, (review), *New Republic* (October 25, 1948), p. 26.

8. Joseph Wood Krutch, (review), *Nation* (October 23, 1948), p. 473.

9. Wolcott Gibbs, (review), *The New Yorker* (October 18, 1948), p. 51.

not because they are evil but because they are a waste of his talents and do not fit into her image of Southern gentility. Then, too, Mrs. Bassett and Reverend Winemiller, the two characters who morally condemn John, are not taken at all seriously by the playwright and emerge as rather foolish small-town prototypes. Finally, if this is a study of good and evil Alma's final scene must be interpreted as a descent into hell. This attaches not only too brutal and obtuse an ending to what is primarily a tone poem but is unmotivated by the lines themselves. Once the conventional terms of good and evil have been discarded it is astonishing how little is left as a basis for interpretation. The director deplores with Mrs. Winemiller that "the pieces don't fit."

The only place to turn is back to the script itself. Like Inspector Maigret combing for clues the director begins the slow process of ferreting out key words, images, and plot elements. This academic bush beating gradually forces certain striking elements into the open: the contrast between the cardboard minor characters and the sharply etched protagonists; strong "anxieties" exhibited by the two leading characters; a search for "balance"; fear and final acceptance of "death"; a strange, repeated image, "I feel like a water lily on a Chinese lagoon"; the strong necessity for "choice" and "action"; a search for "truth"; striking character "change"; and inter-character relationships and influences. All of these qualities and terms are reflected in the writings of the Existentialists. When carefully viewed in the concentrated light of Existentialism the play takes on form and unity. One finds that this approach provides not only a philosophical "spine," but a very practical working basis for staging scenes and portraying characters.

The first clue is the great contrast between the extent of the development of the protagonists and the supporting characters. This is intentional and makes a point. The Existentialists consider two kinds of existence: *existenz* and *dasein*. The former is partially defined by Jaspers as "temporal existence thoroughly and authentically penetrated: the paradox of the unity of temporality and eternity."<sup>10</sup> This applies to John and Alma who are Colin Wilson's *Outsiders*, for they "see too deep and too much."<sup>11</sup> With the possible exception of Dr. Buchanan who acts both as Alma's father confessor and, as shall be shown, the root of John's anxiety, the other citizens of Glorious Hill live the ordinary, humdrum existence of *dasein*.

The greater part of humanity . . . places its life all on the same level, allows itself to be carried away by the wheel of time, lives in short to live, without ever asking itself why.<sup>12</sup>

10. Karl Jaspers, *Reason and Existenz* (The Noonday Press, 1955), p. 63.

11. Colin Wilson, *The Outsider* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1956), p. 15.

12. Guido de Ruggiero, *Existentialism, Disintegration of Man's Soul* (New York: Social Sciences Publishers, Inc., 1948), p. 37.

The relationship between these two sets of characters is clearly defined by Ruggiero:

Existence springs like a fungus from the flat ground of the *Dasein*, or better, to twist a metaphor . . . emerges like Baron Münchhausen pulling himself by the hair out of the swamp into which he has sunk, with the strength of his own arm.<sup>13</sup>

Thus is summed up the struggle of our protagonists against the background of Glorious Hill and the contrasts our director must help the audience to "see."

The price Alma and John pay for their deeper insight is shattering *anxieties* of the kind described in the writings of Martin Heidegger. William Barrett correctly summarizes these ideas:

Anxiety is not fear, being afraid of this or that definite object, but the uncanny feeling of being afraid of nothing at all. . . . Nothingness is a presence within our own Being, always there, in the inner quaking that goes on beneath the calm surface of our preoccupation with things. Anxiety before Nothingness has many modalities and guises: now trembling and creative, now panicky and destructive . . .<sup>14</sup>

The trembling and creative qualities fit Alma and the panicky and destructive characteristics are strong notes upon which the actor portraying John must play.

Having discovered a collective niche where the protagonists operate on a higher and more complex plane than their fellows, they must be viewed separately, for actors are compelled to portray human beings; they cannot play symbols or embodiments of philosophical concepts. What are the roots of these fears and anxieties? Alma's fear is a subjective terror of the shadowy conflicts and emotions within herself which she cannot name or understand. Objectively she fears that someone might penetrate the prim wall she has thrown up and see what she herself cannot see. This motivates her numerous lines, "Did they notice, do you think?" "Do people see it in me?" and so on. She is desperately striving to hold the pieces together so that no one will notice her confusion. In the opening scene with John she chatters too much and laughs too hysterically; her gestures and conversation are too studied, and she avoids his eyes. Sartre would explain this as fear of "the look."

The Other's look fashions my body in its nakedness, causes it to be born, sculpts it, produces it as it is, sees it as I shall never see it. The Other holds a secret—the secret of what I am.<sup>15</sup>

13. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

14. William Barrett, *Irrational Man* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1958), pp. 201-202.

15. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1957), p. 364.

And so she walks through life treading on thin ice, clinging desperately to the minute responsibilities of daily existence. She is clearly Wilson's Existentialist Outsider.

He thinks too much. Thinking has thinned his blood and made him incapable of spontaneous enjoyment. He envies simpler, stupider people because they are undivided.<sup>16</sup>

Alma later admits as much to John as she looks back over her life: "I've lived next door to you all the days of my life, a weak and divided person who stood in adoring awe of your singleness and your strength."

John's anxiety stems from a more concrete source. This is one reason why his struggle is less interesting and more neatly resolved. His fear is of responsibility, for to assume responsibility would mean placing himself in a position of comparison with his father. Dr. Buchanan is a man of such strength and understanding that John's ego will not allow for the possibility of failure to measure up. To compensate, he goes to the extreme in the opposite direction, becoming as dissolute and irresponsible as the facilities of the locale will permit. Alma tries to describe his problem: "I think you're confused, just awfully, awfully confused, as confused as I am—but in a different way . . ." John's confusion is externalized in a self-centered aggressiveness.

The Outsider . . . is a self-divided man; being self-divided, his chief desire is to be unified. He is selfish as a man with a raging toothache would be selfish.<sup>17</sup>

Thus Alma and John's basic action is a search for "balance" and the play's theme can be stated as, "Existentialist 'balance' is essential for personal freedom and fulfillment." Granted, at the beginning of the play each is afraid to face the manifold aspects of life, but it should now be quite clear that Alma's preoccupation with purity and gentility and John's savage indulgence of his senses are character traits and have nothing to do with basic theme. The Existentialists are quite familiar with this personality imbalance.

Human life, when it is normal and balanced, is a synthesis of individual and universal elements, of freedom and discipline, of immediate spiritual movements and of abiding values, of existence and essence. When this vital synthesis is broken, one of the elements affirms itself to the detriment of the other and undergoes a pathological growth damaging the health of the whole organism.<sup>18</sup>

The "death" references which run through the play are most important in understanding the growth in the two major characters. Unless viewed in an Existentialist light, these references make no real contri-

16. Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

18. Ruggiero, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

bution to the play. Alma and John's initial fear of death, subsequent surrender to the idea of death, and final acceptance and release from the terror of death, directly parallel their character change.

In the early scenes, Alma is haunted by the premonition that she will not live through the summer. John hates the medical profession because "a doctor's life is walled in with misery and sickness and death." This death fear contributes to the character's anxieties.

... being which degrades itself, being for death, in the mediocrity of daily life, is a perpetual flight in the face of death.<sup>19</sup>

Both characters reach a point where they stop running and turn to look death squarely in the face. This occurs for Alma when John leaves town and she becomes strangely ill. She cries out, "I want to die. I want to die." John meets death face to face when he plunges into the fever clinic work which his murdered father left unfinished. According to Camus, this should be the beginning of freedom from anxiety, the beginning of the balanced personality.

Likewise, completely turned toward death . . . [one] feels released from everything outside that passionate attention crystallizing in him. He enjoys a freedom with regard to common rules . . . death and the absurd are here the principles of the only reasonable freedom: that which a human heart can experience and live.<sup>20</sup>

This is exactly what happens to John and Alma. Both have achieved a sense of freedom by the final curtain. Both are relaxed, sure of who they are and what must be done. Alma reveals the extent of her change when she says, "I know I'm not going to die—it isn't going to be that easy!" John's achievement of balance is more passive, but no less complete. He states, "I've settled with life on fairly acceptable terms. Isn't that all a reasonable person can ask for?"

One of the most disturbing lines in the play is that which Alma repeats on two occasions after taking sleeping tablets: "I feel like a water lily, a water lily on a Chinese lagoon." The line is first delivered when Alma shows signs of change and again at the end of the play when the metamorphosis is complete. The image is one of complete detachment from reality and indicates a step on the way to freedom. There are many references in the writings of the Existentialists to exotic images and visions accompanying moments of detachment. These are very often of a sensuous nature.

... a refreshing laughter rose in me, and suddenly . . . it soared aloft like a soap-bubble, reflecting the whole world in minature on its rainbow surface, and then softly burst . . .

... I needed no more wine. The golden trail was blazed and I

19. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

20. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Alfred H. Knopf, 1955), pp. 59-60.

was reminded of the eternal, and of Mozart, and the stars. For an hour I could breathe once more and live and face existence, without the need to suffer torment, fear or shame.<sup>21</sup>

Acceptance of death and moments of detachment from reality have helped our characters on their respective paths to freedom. There remains another important step which echoes the core of Existentialist philosophy; the absolute necessity of *choice*, a choice involving *action*, and a willingness to accept the consequences of this choice. Here lies another reason for the greater interest in Alma, for her moment of choice is dramatized while John's is barely suggested. Alma chooses action when she opens the Christmas present Nellie gives her in the park and sees John's name on the card. At that moment she chooses to do what she feels must be done, to offer herself to him. Alma has only one line to show that a decision has been made, a decision which she knows will change the course of her life. In order to show this, her exit line, as she looks up at the statue of the angel must be read, "This is the only angel in Glorious Hill and *her* body is stone and *her* blood is mineral water," implying "but mine is so no longer." She has shed her lethargy and when she leaves the stage she is a woman with a purpose.

John's decision to continue his father's work does not occur on stage. The actor has only one brief moment to show the audience that the old John is no more and a change is in progress. As his father lies dying in the next room John is left alone in the office. His bitterness and rebellion melt away and as the lights come down on the scene he has broken into tears at his father's desk and for the first time in years is able to say, "Father."

The choices made by these two form the real turning point of plot and character. The necessity of choice of action is propounded by many Existentialist philosophers who disagree on other points.

There always comes a time when man must choose between contemplation and action.<sup>22</sup>

Through his choice he involves all mankind, and he can not avoid making a choice. . . .<sup>23</sup>

. . . freedom is shown to be the reconciliation of necessity and free choice; I can because I must; though my choice is free I bind myself by it; I carry out and accept its consequences. . . .<sup>24</sup>

It is now necessary to fix our sights on the next to the last scene of the play, the moment when Alma offers herself to John and is rebuffed. Insult is added to injury as Nellie enters to show off the engagement

21. Hermann Hesse, *Steppenwolf*, trans. Basil Creighton (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1929), pp. 44 and 46.

22. Camus, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

23. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism*, trans. Bernard Fechtman (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957), p. 41.

24. I. M. Bochenksi, *Contemporary European Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956), p. 194.

ring John has just given her. This is certainly the denouement of the play and it is fraught with what appear on the surface to be inconsistencies. Again the application of Existentialist philosophy will help. John is of little interest here, having already found his "balance" in the form of comfortable bourgeois responsibility, so the focus of attention falls on Alma.

She enters more relaxed and natural than she has ever been. Gone are the nervous mannerisms, the evasions. She searches John's eyes as she offers herself to him. Most startling of all, when John refuses her, she simply replies, "Then the answer is no!" Realistically, this is difficult to reconcile with the Alma we have known. Quite simply, she is willing to face the consequences of her chosen action and is prepared for the possibility of failure. Earlier in the scene she says as much: "I say, ask for all but expect to get nothing." It is quite clear to her that

If a solution exists it must be sought, not in reasoning, but in examination of experience. We must keep in mind the logical possibility that a solution may not exist.<sup>25</sup>

From the moment of John's refusal Alma grows in strength and depth. She is beginning to be involved in the world about her. Does she now understand that "only man is open to liberty, possibility, transcendence, and hence to shipwreck, [and] accepting his fate freely and lovingly . . . he celebrates his ultimate triumph"?<sup>26</sup> She must, for she freely admits that she is weak and divided, a great concession for the girl one remembers from the earlier scenes.

The picture is about to be completed for Alma. She cries out for final Truth: "You said, let's talk truthfully, well, let's do! Unsparsingly truthfully, even shamelessly, then!" Both characters have been searching for "truth" throughout the play and at last it is revealed, stripped of all evasion and pretense. Existentialist salvation is at hand, for ". . . truth is in essence freedom. . . ."<sup>27</sup>

Standing before us now are a balanced young man and a complete and mature woman, at least in the Existentialist sense. Significant is the fact that no father confessor, analyst, miracle of divine intervention, or *deus ex machina* has been involved in the metamorphosis. It was wrought through pain and struggle by the individual himself and assisted by strong inter-character influences. This concept of the responsibility of man to man has led the Existentialists to coin such phrases as "I and thou," "being-with-another," and "being-for-another" to articulate this aspect of their philosophy. Jaspers observes, ". . . I cannot even become myself alone without emerging out of my being

25. Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

26. Ruggiero, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

27. Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth," *Existence and Being* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1949), p. 337.

with others."<sup>28</sup> This certainly sheds light on the relationship between John and Alma and their importance to one another.

The final blow, Nellie's engagement to John, sends the already exhausted Alma from the room in sobs. This is not at all in conflict with our preceding discussion when one keeps in mind that Alma is human with human emotions, but her momentary unhappiness is overshadowed by her new awakening to life.

The concluding scene is now completely motivated. What will Alma do with her newly found freedom? She will live. Relaxed and calm she takes a sleeping tablet and drinks from the fountain of Eternity for the last time. A nervous young travelling salesman appears and Alma engages him in conversation. Watching him she senses in him the same self-doubts and loneliness which tormented her on this bench a few months before. She tries to put him at ease, for she knows all too well that

... the recognition that in the end there is nothing that sustains us should lead us to love one another, as survivors on a life raft, at the moment they grasp that the ocean is shoreless and that no rescue ship is coming, can only have compassion on one another.<sup>29</sup>

When she invites him to the Moon Lake Casino it has neither good nor evil connotations to her but reflects her new life where vague nostalgias and longings have been replaced by the frank examination of experience. As she exits, the blues music of the Casino already setting the rhythm of her movements, she pauses to wave at the statue of Eternity. At first this seemed a gesture of, "good-bye," but now I believe it is a greeting. One of Alma's last lines echoes her Existential acceptance of life: "Life's full of little mercies like that, not *big* mercies but comfortable *little* mercies. And so we go on . . ."

It is unimportant to theorize about Alma's future and wrong to moralize upon the direction her life has taken, for this belittles the magnitude of her struggle and the importance of her self-completion.

The approach we have here attempted to describe might assist in the unraveling of complexities in other modern plays. For isn't it possible that new yardsticks are needed to measure and interpret plays which mirror such diversified times as ours? Oliver in Granville-Barker's *The Secret Life* anticipated the problem three decades ago: "Why doesn't life plant out into pretty patterns and happy endings? Why isn't it all made easy for you to understand?"<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps Tennessee Williams' evasive answer was more succinct than one at first suspected. "I write about life," he said.

JACK BROOKING

28. Jaspers, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

29. Barrett, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

30. Harley Granville-Barker, *The Secret Life* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson; Boston: Little Brown & Company, 1928), p. 152.

# THE CAREER OF MAXWELL ANDERSON: A CHECK LIST OF BOOKS AND ARTICLES

ON OCTOBER 18, 1958, not long before his death, Maxwell Anderson celebrated thirty-five years in the professional theater, a career that began in 1923 with the short-lived production of *White Desert* at the Princess Theatre, New York. He ended his years of service to the American theater with two plays: *The Day the Money Stopped* (in collaboration with Brendan Gill) and *The Golden Six*.

This bibliography of items by and about Mr. Anderson, though not complete, is comprehensive enough to demonstrate that he merits the respect his friends have paid him.

Two classes of materials are excluded: reviews in daily and weekly journals and plays included in anthologies. One may trace the critical reception of Mr. Anderson's works by consulting the *New York Times Index* and the *Critics' Theatre Reviews* (1940 to date).<sup>1</sup> The plays included in anthologies are listed in *Firkins' Index to Plays, 1800-1926* and its supplement (1927, 1935), in *West and Peake's Play Index, 1949-1952* (1953), and in "A Survey of Drama Anthologies" in the December 1957 issue of *College English*.

## WORKS BY ANDERSON

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*Eleven Verse Plays, 1929-1939*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1940. (*Elizabeth the Queen, Night Over Taos, Mary of Scotland, Valley Forge, Winterset, The Wingless Victory, High Tor, The*

1. In order to facilitate a search through indices the following list of New York opening dates is offered: *White Desert*, 18 October 1923; *What Price*, 3 September 1924; *Outside*, 7 September 1925; *First Flight*, 17 September 1925; *Buccaneer*, 2 October 1925; *Saturday's Children*, 26 January 1927; *Gods*, 24 October 1928; *Gypsy*, 14 January 1929; *Elizabeth*, 3 November 1930; *Night Over Taos*, 9 March 1932; *Both Your Houses*, 6 March 1933; *Mary*, 27 November 1933; *Valley Forge*, 10 December 1934; *Winterset*, 25 September 1935; *Wingless Victory*, 25 December 1936; *High Tor*, 9 January 1937; *Maque*, 3 February 1937; *Star-Wagon*, 29 September 1937; *Knickerbocker*, 19 October 1938; *Key Largo*, 27 November 1939; *Journey*, 5 October 1940; *Candle*, 22 October 1941; *Eve*, 7 October 1942; *Storm*, 11 January 1944; *Truckline*, 27 February 1946; *Joan*, 18 November 1946; *Anne*, 8 December 1948; *Lost in the Stars*, 30 October 1949; *Barefoot*, 31 October 1951; *Bad Seed*, 8 December 1954; *Day the Money Stopped*, 20 February 1958; *Golden Six*, 26 October 1958.

*Masque of Kings, The Feast of Ortolans, Second Overture, Key Largo.)*

*Four Verse Plays.* New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1959. (*Elizabeth the Queen, Mary of Scotland, High Tor, Winterset.*)

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*Gods of the Lightning and Outside Looking In.* New York: Longmans, Green, 1928. *Gods*, written in collaboration with Harold Hickerson, has been translated into Spanish and German as *Und Wir Haben Nichts Dagegen Getan*, tr. Konrad Maril. Berlin: S. Fischer, 1930, and as "Los Mesianestas," tr. Horacio de Castro, in *Teatro Social Norteamericano*. Madrid: M. Aguilar, 1931.

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*Mary of Scotland.* Washington, D. C.: Anderson House, 1933, ltd. ed.; Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, Doran, 1934, 1936; New York and London: Samuel French, 1937, acting ed.

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*Star-Wagon.* Washington, D. C.: Anderson House, 1937; New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1948, acting ed.

*High Tor.* Washington, D. C.: Anderson House, 1937; New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1948, acting ed.

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*Key Largo.* Washington, D. C.: Anderson House, 1939.

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*Lost in the Stars.* New York: William Sloane Associates, 1950; London: John Lane, 1951.

*Barefoot in Athens.* New York: William Sloane Associates, 1951; Dramatists Play Service, 1952, acting ed.

*Bad Seed.* New York: Dodd, Mead, 1955; New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1957, rev. acting ed.

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"Second Overture," *The Stage Magazine*, XV (March 1938), 41-45; New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1940.

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VEDDER M. GILBERT

## THE FUSION OF POETRY AND DRAMA IN *BLOOD WEDDING*

As T. S. ELIOT has suggested, the use of poetry in drama "must justify itself dramatically, and not merely be fine poetry shaped into dramatic form."<sup>1</sup> This problem of drama-poetry fusion immediately confronts any would-be creator of modern poetic drama and, ultimately, the critic of poetic drama as well. When poetic drama is unsuccessful, the failure is ascribed to the dominance of one mode of expression over the other. Thus, Maeterlinck is often said to have sacrificed dramatic action and characterization to poetic symbolism; conversely, Maxwell Anderson is said to be an excellent dramatist who utilizes a pedestrian poetry. Though Christopher Fry is sometimes said to have made the best of the two possible worlds, nevertheless, the common critical complaint is that Fry's poetry is so sparkling and allusive that one reads his plays only for the poetry.

It seems to me that only two modern playwrights have successfully combined dramatic technique and structure with heightened poetic language. The Eliot of *Murder in the Cathedral* is certainly one. But what T. R. Henn offers as the "resources" of Eliot ("The equipment of a great poet, of a carefully-poised and conscientious critic of literature, awareness of the European tradition, and a strong religious sense . . .")<sup>2</sup> applies equally well to Federico Garcia Lorca.

Lorca's *Blood Wedding* is a play of great tragic intensity. There is no denying its dramatic validity; but, as far as I know, little has been said of the poetic element which so subtly enhances and intensifies its dramatic structure. The plot is simple, centered around the triangle of the Bride, the Bridegroom, and the Lover. For years the family of the Bridegroom and the family of the Lover have been involved in a blood feud. Immediately after the nuptials, the Bride and the Lover ride off together. A revengeful chase begins; and both the Bridegroom and the Lover are killed in a duel with knives. Only the women—the Bridegroom's mother, the Bride, and the Lover's wife—survive, and in the final scene, they gather to commemorate ritualistically their dead.

The austere outline of this feminine tragedy invites comparison with J. M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea*. A similar elemental conflict, the same sense of brooding, implacable Fate, a kindred passivity and ac-

1. *Poetry and Drama* (Cambridge, Mass., 1951), p. 10.

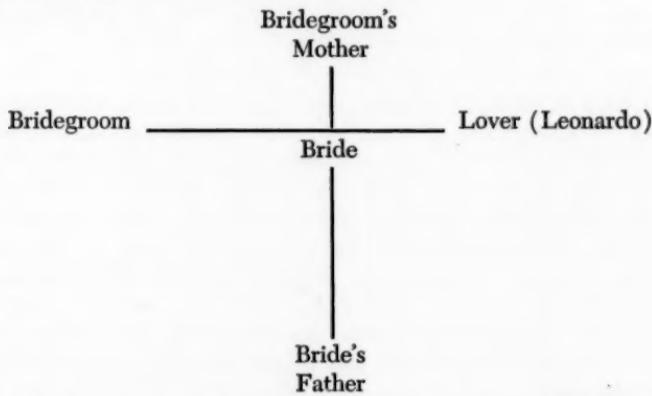
2. *The Harvest of Tragedy* (London, 1956), p. 217.

ceptance exist in both plays. But the component which made it possible for Lorca to write an expanding drama of three acts is the density and richness of texture provided by the language of the play. Despite its natural rhythm and suggestive idiom, the language of *Riders to the Sea*—as Synge must have intuitively, and rightly, realized—will support the reader's imagination for only a limited period of time without dropping into mere sentimentality.

Both *Riders to the Sea* and *Blood Wedding* transcend the realistic level and reach toward the universal, but Lorca achieves his goal by a more obviously expressionistic technique than does Synge. Leonardo, the lover, is the only character in *Blood Wedding* who is given a name; and, appositely, he is the character most grounded in reality. He is the only one who really acts according to his own desires, who forces his own tragedy, rather than being destiny's puppet. This is not to say that Leonardo is the most dramatic character. Actually, the Bridegroom's mother gives real focus to the play.

The Mother, like old Maurya in *Riders to the Sea*, is both involved in and, at the same time, above the central tragedy. Although she is outside the central love triangle, it is, nevertheless, the Mother who defines and extends the other relationships and antipathies. It is necessary to examine those relationships in order to understand the tension formed by the poetry and the drama.

Appropriately enough, the character associations in *Blood Wedding* might be diagramed in the form of a cross.



The horizontal bar of the cross is the axis of action. The Bridegroom and Leonardo always speak, and are described by others, in terms of action. They are always in movement—going, taking, leading, riding, loving, fighting, killing, realizing, not merely anticipating. And, of course, the inevitable knife duel between Leonardo and the Bride-

groom forms the physical climax. The Bride shuttles back and forth between the two men, rejecting and accepting one or the other as her heart rules her head or vice-versa. Yet she is more a love object than she is one who loves. Her speeches and the descriptions of her are in terms of passivity—sitting; waiting; locking herself in; expecting, not realizing. Significantly, her home has been a cave-home; her love scene with Leonardo is in a wooded shelter, and she is last observed in the sanctuary of the church. Both as precipitator of the violent action, opposite poles of which are represented by her husband and her lover, and as the passive center of the lives of both, the Bride belongs at the point of intersection of the cross.

The vertical bar of the cross is the axis of passivity. The Father of the Bride is less important than these other characters and is further removed from the action than the Mother of the Bridegroom, while the Mother is very close to the action and best understands and interprets that action as it unfolds. Both the Mother and Father would like to mediate the real human problems in the play, but the Mother is too involved in the problems, the Father too isolated from them. Ironically, it is the making of the marriage contract by the Mother and the Father which lights the fuse of the tragedy. Both seek and are denied fertility and creativity—the Mother wants grandsons, and the Father more land and more harvest.

Thus far the dramatic relationships between the chief characters have been explored. The question may now be asked: To what extent does the poetic diction and imagery reinforce and extend these dramatic relationships? And, as a corollary, what kinds of poetic imagery are used?

First of all, Lorca uses conspicuous and frequent color imagery as clues to the inherent dramatic oppositions. Painter as well as dramatic poet, Lorca uses color imagery not only in descriptive passages and expository speeches but also as an important element in staging.

For instance, the dominant color of Act I, Scene I, is yellow. This introductory scene between the Bridegroom and his Mother takes place in a yellow room. Greens are prominently featured in the dialogue here, because an important topic of conversation is the vineyard; but the specific greens mentioned are those tinged with yellow—the green of the olive groves, of a palm leaf, of a thistle. The major metaphor of this scene is the comparison of men to yellow wheat. The Mother makes explicit the association of her son, the Bridegroom, with the color yellow. She says, "That's what I like. Men, men; wheat, wheat." (p. 55).<sup>3</sup>

3. English text used is the translation of Richard L. O'Connell and James Graham-Lujan in *Three Tragedies of Federico García Lorca* (New York, 1947). Spanish text used is *Obras Completas* (Buenos Aires, 1938), vol. I. "Eso me gusta. Los hombres, hombres; el trigo, trigo." P. 30.

Act I, Scene 2, takes place in a rose room. Leonardo is the important character here and he is always connected with gradations of red—rose, copper, blood-red. He is also coupled with silver—the silver of a dagger, the frozen mane of a horse, silvery flies. The yellow color of the bridegroom also suggests gold, and the next time he appears he is “in black corduroy with a great golden chain.” (p. 69).<sup>4</sup> Significantly, Leonardo has been having difficulty with the wheat-buyers, men of “yellow.” Thus, at the end of the first two scenes, obvious color antimonies have been established which underline the fundamental opposition of the two principal male characters: yellow and gold for the bridegroom, red and silver for Leonardo. For further interesting contrast, it should be noted that the greens of Scene 2 are tinged, not with yellow as in Scene 1, but with the more somber notes of black or blue.

The Bride, not unexpectedly, has as one of her colors, white. Ironically, she is suspected by the Bridegroom’s Mother of being impure, of having already loved Leonardo. Too, the white sets her in opposition to the black of the Mother. The Mother is dressed in black satin in Act 1, Scene 3.

The members of the triangle are brought together for the first time in Act II, Scene 1; and the result is a profusion of color reference. The first part of the scene is a confrontation of the Bride by Leonardo. Here the dominating hues are white, silver, red, rose, pink—the colors of the Bride, of Leonardo, or of a combination shade. In the second part of the scene the Bridegroom replaces Leonardo on the stage, and the color scheme changes. Now the predominant note is struck by shades of yellow—jasmine, citron, gold.

Act II, Scene 2, is almost devoid of color. The tension of the approaching conflict is sustained by other kinds of imagistic devices in a neutral setting of grays and tans. Color patterns return in Scene 1, Act III, but they are introduced here in a new and interesting way. Up to this point Lorca has made skillful use of color image to illuminate the basic conflict in the play, to illustrate character, and to suggest character relationships. Here, for the first time, he seems to use color as an auxiliary technique rather than as a supplement to structure or characterization.

By this I mean not only that the characters and stage settings are at their most markedly expressionistic here, but also that Lorca abandons impressionistic color (complementary, harmonious, fused) in favor of expressionistic color (disunifying and clashing). The setting is a stylized forest in which appear the Bride, the Bridegroom and the Lover. But their appearance is anticipated, interrupted, and eulogized by a kind of chorus (Three Woodcutters), by the messenger of Death

4. “... de pana negra con gran cadena de oro.” P. 52.

(the Moon), and Death herself, disguised as an Old Woman. The colors which dominate here are blue and green; frequently they are juxtaposed—not merely in the lines of dialogue, but even in the lighting directions. For instance, the Old Woman is covered with a thin green cloth but the spot is an intense blue. The *coup de theatre* is, obviously, an eerie one. Earlier in the play, blue has been associated with death, green with life. Here the two come together, and at the end of the scene the tragedy takes place:

*The Moon appears very slowly. The stage takes on a strong blue light. The two violins are heard. Suddenly two long, ear-splitting shrieks are heard, and the music of the two violins is cut short. At the second shriek The Beggar Woman appears and stands with her back to the audience. She opens her cape and stands in the center of the stage like a great bird with immense wings. The Moon halts. The curtain comes down in absolute silence.* (p. 148)<sup>5</sup>

To contrast with the sweeping violence of the scene just described, the last scene of *Blood Wedding* is silent and sculpturesque. The colors must be pure and classic. Here are Lorca's stage directions:

*A white dwelling with arches and thick walls. To the right and left, are white stairs. At the back, a great arch and a wall of the same color. The floor also should be shining white. This simple dwelling should have the monumental feeling of a church. There should not be a single gray nor any shadow, not even what is necessary for perspective.* (p. 149)<sup>6</sup>

Again, as in Act II, Scene 2, the color imagery is not paramount. The colors which are employed are primarily achromatic (black and white) or pale tints (jasmine, wax, ivory). There is one shocking color note in this otherwise austere setting. As the curtain rises, two girls dressed in dark blue are seen winding a red skein: a final reminder, in terms of Lorca's color pattern, of the most basic opposition of all—life and death.

The patterns of color imagery in *Blood Wedding* have been examined at some length, but these patterns form only one of several imagistic schemata which Lorca integrally and painstakingly employs. The others are just as viable as the one traced, but they will be discussed only in summary terms. In any case, they are put to the same use as the color images and are manipulated in much the same way—largely as contrarieties around the Bridegroom-Bride-Leonardo axis and as

5. "Aparece la Luna muy despacio. La escena adquiere una fuerte luz azul. Se oyen los dos violines. Bruscamente se oyen dos largos gritos desgarrados, y se corta la música de los violines. Al segundo grito aparece la Mendiga y queda de espaldas. Abre el manto y queda en el centro como un gran pájaro de alas immensas. La Luna se detiene. El telón baja en medio de un silencio absoluto." P. 126.

6. "Habitación blanca con arcos y gruesos muros. A la derecha y a la izquierda escaleras blancas. Gran arco al fondo y pared del mismo color. El suelo será también de un blanco reluciente. Esta habitación simple tendrá un sentido monumental de iglesia. No habrá ni un gris, ni una sombra, ni siquiera lo preciso para la perspectiva." P. 127.

fusion or double-images around the Mother-Bride-Father axis. The other image patterns may be listed conveniently thus:

fruit	weeds
fertility	sterility
life	death
sun	moon
tame animals	wild animals
water and sea	drouth and desert
softness	hardness
fineness	coarseness
dullness	sharpness
yielding	tense

Now, throughout most of the play the Bridegroom is associated with objects and actions corresponding to the list on the left, Leonardo with that on the right. For example, the Bridegroom is connected with grapes, the vineyard, the harvest, woolly dogs, open-work stockings, corduroy, flowers, the sea. Leonardo is connected with arroyos, knives, an unmanageable horse, flies, dusty plains, cactus, stones, and sand. This basic opposition controls the passive dramatic axis as well. When the Bride is swayed toward the Bridegroom, the dialogue swarms with the imagery associated with him; when she turns toward Leonardo, that set predominates. The Mother's conversation is affected in the same way.

However, the Mother, the Bride, and the Father also bring the opposites together; and it is in the tension of the fused images that Lorca becomes particularly effective. The title itself, *Blood Wedding*, is only the most obvious example of the irony and ambivalence achieved in this way. The Father says "How beautiful it is to bring things together!" (p.72).<sup>7</sup> He may well be speaking for Lorca, the playwright and poet.

Many examples of the fusion are dynamic, serving as foreshadowing of the violence to come. Frequent references such as "slicing a young man's body," "serpent in the chest," "arms sliced by the machine" fall into this category. Variants carry out the same motif: "hit on the forehead with a rock," "digging with nails," "crushing against the wall." Other examples make primary use of juxtaposed substantives: "palm leaf and rock salt," "dagger in the eyes," "metal cradle," "vine like a silver coin," "thorn in the heart," "cord in the teeth," "knot in the throat," "bloody earth in a glass and topaze shrine," "ashes of metals," "glass splinters in the tongue," "sand in the eyes," "chaff on the breeze."

7. "Para verlo todo junto, i que junto es una hermosura!" P. 55.

One of the most interesting examples, certainly the most memorable one, occurs in the final scene. Death, disguised as an old Beggar Woman, makes a brief appearance and speaks to two girls:

Beggar Woman

Crushed flowers for eyes, and their teeth  
two fistfuls of hard-frozen snow.  
Both of them fell, and the bride returns  
with bloodstains on her skirt and hair.  
And they come covered with two sheets  
carried on the shoulders of two tall boys.  
That's how it was; nothing more. What was fitting.  
Over the golden flower, dirty sand.

(She goes. *The Girls bow their heads and start going out rhythmically.*)

First Girl

Dirty sand.

Second Girl

Over the golden flower. (p. 155).<sup>8</sup>

The play continues briefly as the Mother and the Bride come together to eulogize the dead. But the brilliant image of dirty sand on the golden flower lingers provocatively. Subject and symbol are now one.

Apropos of Marcel Proust's masterpiece, C. W. M. Johnson has said:

*A la recherche du temps perdu* is a matrix of images related to each other in subtle ways. These images thread through the story, undergo development, and in general behave like the main characters, at times just present in a scene, at other times taking the center of the stage and delivering long monologues, and often demanding a reorientation of our thinking because of the metamorphoses they undergo. The figure is extravagant; but it points to an unrecognized source of unity in the work.<sup>9</sup>

Lorca has neither time nor space in *Blood Wedding* to allow his images to dominate the scene. They are submerged in the movement of the play. Nevertheless, it is the images that evoke the tone, that fix, as it were, our final impression of the character relationships and the basic dramatic conflict.

8.

Mendiga

Flores rotas los ojos, y sus dientes  
dos puñados de nieve endurecida.  
Los dos cayeron, y la novia vuelve  
teñida en sangre falda y cabellera.  
Cubiertos con dos mantas ellos vienen  
sobre los hombros de los mozos altos.  
Así fué: nada más. Eso lo justo.  
Sobre la flor del oro, sucia arena.  
(Se va. *Las Muchachas inclinan las cabezas*  
*y ritmicamente van saliendo.*)

Muchacha 1a

Sucia arena.

Muchacha 2a

Sobre la flor del oro.

Pp. 132-133.

9. "Tone in *A la recherche du temps perdu*," in William Van O'Connor (Ed.), *Forms of Modern Fiction* (Minneapolis, 1948), 201-210.

It is important to note that Lorca's images move contextually within a special rhythm and tempo, similar to that of a *cante hondo* rendered by Carlos Montoya. The tempo accentuates the imagery incredibly. I observed an interesting result of this accentuation last year at the opening performance of a student production of *Blood Wedding*. Members of my class in Modern Drama, where the play had been discussed as literature, were excited by the *drama* of the play. Members of an acting class, who had discussed the play in terms of casting, staging, and dramatic structure, were astonished at the forcefulness of the poetry. That this incident also points up the harmony of the two elements is, of course, obvious.

ROBERT BARNES

## MODERN INDIAN DRAMA

AS RECENTLY AS SIX YEARS AGO, New Delhi, the capital of the Indian Republic, lacked a theater with adequate facilities for staging modern productions. When, in 1953, the Central Executive of the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society, of which the writer happens to be the Secretary, considered the question of taking a loan from the Government for building a theater, there were many who felt that it would be a suicidal venture, as the returns would not meet the four and a half per cent interest on the loan, not to say anything of the refund of the capital. Today, however, fifty dramatic groups are operating in the capital alone and the Fine Arts Theater is booked months in advance by these and others from the various regions.

This phenomenal—almost hysterical—activity is due basically to the energy generated by the political emancipation. The scene is one of baffling variety of approaches and styles and without some knowledge of the historical background, it would be impossible to make a coherent appraisal of contemporary dramatic effort in India.

We cannot afford to dwell too long on a retrospect of the classical tradition. But it is necessary to remember that, beginning in romantic stories sketched in verse dialogues in the Rig-Veda and in bardic recitals, Sanskrit drama had yielded a rich variety of plays during the early centuries of the Christian era. Contrary to the common assumption that the Indian tradition shied away from tragedies, Bhasa in the third century had produced genuine tragedies in which really great-hearted men fell due to a tragic flaw in their character and the tragic catharsis was achieved by the insight these heroes acquired regarding themselves in confronting their sombre destiny. Romantic comedy with plenty of vitality and humor was created by Sundraka and was given finer psychological overtones by Kalidasa in the fourth and Bhavabhuti in the seventh centuries. Visakhadatta, about 800 A.D. perfected the comedy of intricate plots, based on espionage and political intrigues which Chanakya, the great Maurya statesman and India's Machiavelli, had perfected into a regular science. Bharata provided the theoretical framework for the aesthetics as well as the production techniques of this classical achievement.

With the decline of Sanskrit, this tradition lost its creative momentum. If it had not prolonged itself in transformations, it would have been irrelevant even to mention classical drama in this article. But what really happened was that the dramaturgy of Bharata and the Sanskrit plays inspired new forms in the modern Indian languages

when these began to get stabilized. The *Yatras* of Bengal, the *Yakshaganas* of Andhra Pradesh and the *Kathakali* of Kerala are the products of this cyclical regeneration after the classical decay. Some writers have classed them as folk drama. I am afraid that this is misleading taxonomy. The rich Sanskrit tissue of the language of these forms and their very close adherence to Bharata's dramaturgic canons, which recent research has established beyond doubt, prove that they are as integrally related to the culture of the elites as Kalidasa was to the aristocratic stratum of the Gupta empire. Let us, therefore, call them forms of traditional drama, since they really evolved by creative mutations in the classical heredity.

A very important difference between classical and traditional drama is the fact that the latter are verse dramas. Kalidasa, the greatest poet in the Sanskrit tradition, had avoided verse as the normal medium for his dramas. Verse stanzas were indeed used for descriptive purposes as well as for expressing emotional intensity. The dialogues, however, were mostly in prose. But traditional drama accepted verse as its sole medium. This paved the way for another transformation. In Sanskrit plays, the verse stanzas were not sung; they were only recited. There were songs in Sanskrit plays, but they were in Prakrit. When traditional drama went over wholly to verse and the layered distinction between aristocratic Sanskrit and colloquial Prakrit was obliterated by the use of the homogeneous modern Indian languages, music began to dominate the presentation. Traditional drama thus became opera which gave enormous importance to music and dance.

Now comes a rather bizarre intermezzo. From 1870 to the close of the century, a spectacular type of drama, which accepted with fanatical enthusiasm the principle that there is no business like show business, became increasingly popular all over India. The Madan Theater Company of Calcutta and the Balliwalla, Alfred and New Alfred Theatrical Companies of Bombay commercialised the theater with a killing efficiency. Drop curtains with gorgeous paintings, monumental sets, incredibly ornate costumes, and an unbridled passion for sensational stage effects (like running a train and flying a plane on the stage) made these plays box office successes. It took the people nearly half a century to shake off the hangover from this heavy dose of theatricality.

Two forms emerged subsequently. Both retained the heavy idiom of the spectacle play, but shed most of the vulgar sensationalism. The old love of the traditional opera lingered in one of these forms which thus became the musical play. The other progressively relegated music to minor importance. The forms were still a little ungainly and inflexible. Nevertheless, the whole approach was more serious and modern Indian drama began its first spirited engagement with social reality in these

forms. In spite of the fact that it was a musical play, Govind Ballab Dewal's *Sharada* handled the theme of a rich old man wanting to marry a teen-age girl from a poor family with reformist zeal and effectiveness. When the political struggle began to gather momentum, these plays of both types came to reflect the ardent aspirations of the people. Bengali plays like *Sirajudaulla*, *Mir Kassim* and *Emperor Shivaji* were fervently nationalistic in sentiment. Khadilkar's Marathi play, *The Slaying of Keechak*, ostensibly retold an episode from the Mahabharata epic, but was really a forceful satire of the authoritarian regime of Governor-General Lord Curzon. Banned by the British Government, it was ultimately resurrected by the Congress Ministry in 1937.

European drama was introduced into India very early. Already before the battle of Plassey, an English theater was in existence in Calcutta and Governor-General Warren Hastings is mentioned as one of its subscribers. Sheridan's *School for Scandal* seems to have been a steady favourite. Amateur groups among the British officials who ruled the empire and college dramatic societies produced an increasing number of European plays, mostly English, as the years went by.

The heterogeneity of the contemporary scene is due to the fact that all these forms coexist today. An astonishing fact connected with this is that the awareness of this coexistence is itself a very recent development. Even today, the educated person in any region of India has a more intimate knowledge of English literary traditions than of the heritage of a neighbouring region. This is because of the diversity of languages in India. It was the National Drama Festival of 1954, with which the writer had the luck to be associated as one of the organizers, that enabled the nation to realise the magnificent variety of its own heritage for the first time. Scarcely ever in the past had there been an occasion when the dramatic talent of all India was assembled at any one place. In the case of the empires of the past which were multilingual, a few traditions had coalesced. For instance, the Vijayanagar of Krishna Deva Raja's time had patronised four traditions, Sanskrit, Telugu, Tamil, and Kanarese. The Festival of 1954 assembled seven hundred plays in fifteen Indian languages, including Sanskrit, in the various state capitals and the best plays in each language were presented in New Delhi. It is not an exaggeration to say that even the inadequately coherent panoramic picture presented in this article would have been impossible if the Festival had not been held.

Let us now attempt a survey of the contemporary scene. The revival of interest in Sanskrit studies is giving increasing momentum to the revival of Sanskrit plays. Bombay and Poona, which have always been great centres of Sanskrit research, have taken the lead in this revival.

Admittedly, these efforts can interest only the small circles of scholars who know Sanskrit. But they are useful in acquainting the present generation with the past legacy. They also stimulate fruitful controversies regarding the techniques of presentation. For, although scholars like Chandra Bhan Gupta and Raghavan have done patient research on the presentation of Sanskrit plays, details, which are not above controversy and discussions, even if they are not going to decide definitely what was the practice in the past, can yield ideas on problems of presentation useful for contemporary practice as well.

The traditional operatic forms like *Kathakali* are becoming increasingly popular even beyond the frontiers of their own regions, in spite of the difficulties in language. Extremely stylised forms, with distinct costumes, make-up and, in some cases, masks as well, the traditional operas are cast in an antique mould which is not plastic enough to receive impulses from contemporary social reality. A *Kathakali* libretto can and does contain reflections on the larger issues of life and death, but its grand style would end up in bathos if it sought to replace its Homeric battles by election contests. Therefore, a lighter and more supple form is now being evolved which approximates the European ballet. Uday Shankar's *Rhythm of Life*, Shanti Burdhan's *Spirit of India* and *India Immortal* and the very recent *Dusk and Dawn* by Sachin Shankar belong to this type. They come to grips with social reality, but the predominance of the elements of mime and ballet make it difficult to regard them as drama.

Show business continues to flourish and will remain popular till the high percentage of illiteracy in the country is wiped out. Nawab Rajamanickam of South India produces the most spectacular plays of this type, dealing with mythological and historical themes. A far more civilised refinement of this form has recently emerged, the festival play in homage to Rama. The *Ramalila* is a folk play with a hoary tradition behind it, like the Passion Play of Oberammergau. The folk play continues to be celebrated every year in important centres of North India. But, alongside, a stylised modern interpretation is now crystallising which incorporates ballet, mime and choral music and retains the visual impact of the spectacle play without its crude sensationalism. The sensitive choreography of this form is borrowed from the ballets of Uday Shankar and Sachin Shankar, but the whole approach is less sophisticated.

The musical play had at first shown little strength to compete with the realistic modern play when the latter began to get stabilised. But there has been a surprising revival recently, especially in South India. The reason is that certain political groups are finding it an ideal form for propaganda purposes. The demands for swift communication of

ideas and intelligibility are bringing about a radical change in the music used in these plays. Formerly the songs were cast in the heavy, classical mould. A more supple lyric is now emerging. Set to attractive melodic patterns, these lyrics are easily picked up, especially by school boys and the working population.

Prithvi Raj continues the tradition of the plays that emerged during the nationalist struggle. He has shed dance and music (except for an opening chorus) and has gone in for realistic sets. But for a lingering heaviness in the handling of stage decor, the occasional swell of rhetoric in the dialogues and a not wholly exorcised love of melodrama, his plays would have been classed as modern. His themes always have mass appeal. *The Wall* seeks to break down the wall of hatred and misunderstanding that keeps apart brothers, neighbours, communities. The message of *Pathan* is Hindu-Muslim unity.

The modern Indian drama is undoubtedly a product of the intimate contact with the West. Plays began to be written under the impact of European models and their presentation has also been helped along by the continuous production of European plays in India. Formerly, only English plays were being staged. Today, Sophocles, Molière, Chekhov, Sartre, Anouilh, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams and Eugene O'Neill are being presented to Indian audiences. It cannot be denied that Indian playwrights have learned valuable things about the dramatic handling of social reality from European writers. In all the languages today, plays of this type are becoming increasingly popular. R. G. Anand's plays of this kind have been unqualified successes. In  *Elections* he showed what a degrading game politics can be if politicians lack character. In *We Indians*, Anand worked towards the emotional integration of the nation—an ideal yet to be fully realised—by juxtaposing two families, one from Madras and the other from Punjab and studying their interacting destinies with a boisterous humour, which had, wrapped up within it, a fairly pungent pill of social criticism. Its handling of double sets in which action proceeded simultaneously showed excellent stagecraft. Successful plays attacking social problems are also being translated to a steadily increasing extent from one Indian language to another.

Can there be such a thing as a modern dramatic form which is genuinely Indian in spirit? The question is not easy to answer. In allied fields of creative activity also it has not found a definitive answer. Regressive, atavistic styles are still flourishing in Indian painting. But they cannot be called modern. Modern Indian painting, on the other hand, seems to have no locale. It is like work produced in any European centre. There certainly is not the slightest harm in such cosmopolitanism of form, especially when the content of life has become

cosmopolitan. Nevertheless, there still remains the possibility of the emergence of a specifically Indian form which can be universal in appeal and at the same time have a specific morphology.

Tagore had paved the way for this. The Sanskrit word for drama shows how intrinsic were dance and music to the original conception of the form. Denouncing imitative realism, he concentrated on the problem of stylised presentation. He succeeded in creating a fine personal synthesis of verse, music, dance and acting, which was adequate for handling social reality through the symbolic mimesis of dance and gesture, and which achieved continuity and coordination, not so much through the weight of the structural framework of plot, but through sustained lyrical emotion. The emphasis on mood in his plays and the semisacred effect are genuinely and specifically Indian. If action seems to be suspended in some of them, as in the plays of Maeterlinck, there are agitations, crises and resolutions in the inner depths. The superb stagecraft of the Bohurupee Group of Calcutta has proved that these highly stylised creations, which seem so attenuated when the plays are merely read, have concrete histrionic substance.

In the revival of Indian painting, the aristocratic traditions of the past—Ajanta, Moghul and Rajput schools—were the inspiration of men like Havell and Abanindranath Tagore. Jamini Roy went back to the folk tradition with its vitality and unaffected simplicity. Something of the kind seems to be happening in the case of drama also. In our review in the earlier part of this article, we had not mentioned the poor relations of Indian drama—the village plays like *Ras*, *Nautanki* and *Tamasha*. At least one playwright has shown the courage to acknowledge these poor relations as flesh of our flesh. This is Habib Tanvir. His recent production of the classical drama, Sudraka's *Clay Cart*, as a folk play, has raised a storm of controversy. An essential feature of the folk approach is that there is no attempt to build up a tight dramatic illusion. The actor of the folk play is just a member of the audience who has stepped across the footlights to play a role and, like the actors of "Pyramus and Thisbe" or Anouilh's *Antigone*, he does not bother too much about trying to conceal the fact that he is playing a role. Tanvir followed the folk pattern here, gave masks and elaborate make-up to some of his characters and introduced folk songs. The scholars were not reconciled to the idea of an adaptation of a classic. But, for the others, this bold reinterpretation was not only aesthetically satisfying but also a revelation as regards the vitality of our folk tradition.

A folk style may perhaps evolve alongside the aristocratic tradition initiated by Tagore and, with luck, both may achieve the difficult task of being Indian and being universal at the same time. Meanwhile, the process of self-discovery has only just begun. The Indian Theatre

Centre has undertaken a country-wide survey of traditional dramatic art and this writer, who is associated with the project, feels that the results of the survey will have a profound impact on Indian drama. The Centre is also preparing a bibliography of actable dramas in the different Indian languages and it is expected that about five thousand plays will be collected.

It was the rediscovery of the ancient heritage that brought about the European Renaissance. Who can say that the rediscovered wealth will not stimulate a similar efflorescence in India?

KRISHNA CHAITANYA

# IRONY IN FRANZ WERFEL'S EXPRESSIONISTIC DRAMA *BOCKSGESANG*

Defeat and failure of the Pan-German "Drang nach Osten" intensified the emergence of the new drama in Germany and Austria now characterized as "expressionism." It can be said to have been well under way by 1910 and finished by 1924, when the Ruhr was occupied. In the latter year, this drama was defined as "Das Ekstatische Theater" by Felix Emmel in his book of that title. Bernhard Diebold described it as a drama of intense emotional insight in his *Anarchie im Drama* (1925). In that same year, a survey of the elements of expressionism appeared in *Das Deutsche Drama* by Julius Bab and others. One of its most recent appraisals can be found in "Das Drama des Expressionismus" by Otto Mann.<sup>1</sup> So far, however, scant attention seems to have been paid to one of Franz Werfel's most typical expressionistic plays, *Bocksgesang*, a neglect that has occasioned this essay.

All critical opinion generally supports the view that this new form of drama is derived from Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* tradition and from such August Strindberg dramas as *To Damascus*.<sup>2</sup> Some of its characteristic features include revolt against naturalistic-realistic modes and values; reliance upon characters as types rather than as individuals; presentation of emotional states reaching heights of ecstasy; resort to "der Schrei," so that characters in the throes of great emotion cry and exclaim wildly; emphasis upon the worth of man and need of spiritual brotherhood; occupation with symbols as means of making the subjective dramatically objective; and reliance upon dream-like distortion and incoherence to approximate the inner states of conflict. On the whole, the expressionistic drama has as many ramifications as does its concomitant German cultural phenomenon, expressionism in art, from which this drama took its name, if not its impulse.<sup>3</sup> *Bocksgesang* displays these elements, but its strength as a play does not depend upon them. Its power and impact grow rather out of its basic, ironic perceptions and representations. Among these are the five considered herein: the character and role of the Jew, Feiwel, the filial piety of Mirko Milić, the strength of the unconventional woman in the

1. Hermann Friedmann and Otto Mann, eds., *Expressionismus: Gestalten Einer Literarischen Bewegung* (Heidelberg, Wolfgang Rothe Verlag, 1956), pp. 213-239.

2. Carl E. W. L. Dahlström's *Strindberg's Dramatic Expressionism* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, 1930) is the first authoritative study devoted to this new kind of Strindberg drama.

3. Several recent books attest to the current interest in German Expressionism, e.g., Hans Konrad Roethel, *Modern German Painting* (New York, Reynal & Company, 1957).

person of Stanja, the failure of the deluded scholar-rebel Juvan, and the revitalization of the elder Milićs through disaster.

Irony is a term as complex in its meanings as it is varied in its guises. In general, one associates it with the classical "recognition" and "reversal" that arouse in the audience such desired feelings as laughter or tragic pity. As considered in this essay, irony is that element of dramatic art whereby in both the characters and the patterned action of his *dramatis personae* the dramatist creates an illusion or promise of well-being that the audience either know or fear will not be sustained through the end of the play. When he creates an introductory situation or state of affairs that promises one result but ends with a denouement that reverses the initial premises, the dramatist can be said to be presenting irony. It springs thus from skillful deception or dissimulation practiced by the artist. He begins with dramatic situations that, though appearing simple and innocent, soon take unexpected turns. He tries to confound the confident or disconcert the hopeful as his characters reveal that, as in life, few actions turn out as one might anticipate. As soon as dissimulation enters the course of a dramatic action, a degree of irony must result. Such dissimulation and reversal give *Bocksgesang* its great tensile strength and dynamism.<sup>4</sup>

As Franz Werfel's widow has now revealed, the origin of *Bocksgesang* is itself the outgrowth of an ironic situation. For four years before their marriage, Werfel and Alma Mahler, the widow of the famous composer, were living together as lovers, though Alma was still married to Walter Gropius, the guardian of that famous cradle of German expressionism, the Bauhaus at Weimar. During this tumultuous period, Alma Mahler Gropius was subject to much criticism and advice. On one occasion a fashionable lady came to chide her in the presence of Werfel himself. Here is Mrs. Werfel's account of the origin of the play:

"Werfel fuming, went to lie down on my bedroom couch while I listened with a bored face to her more or less intelligent conversation. After some time I glanced into my room but found him so deeply absorbed in thought that I tiptoed out again. When the lady left, at last, he came back refreshed and cheerful: he had used the time of her call to conceive his *Goat Song*. All primitiveness of this play was so clear in his mind that he went right up to Breitenstein and wrote it down as from dictation."<sup>5</sup>

In that year of 1921, he was still eager to stake his life, his career as a poet and dramatist, and his personal happiness upon the great affairs that he had committed himself to: political and social revolution, the

4. Franz Werfel, *Bocksgesang* (München: Kurt Wolff Verlag, 1931). All subsequent references to this text will appear in parentheses.

5. Alma Mahler Werfel, *And the Bridge Is Love* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1958), pp. 139-140.

love of a married woman, and a drama that might offend its audience. He knew that he was following courses that could bring him disaster. In fact, he viewed his own situation with much the same awareness of possible reversal as when he drafted the situations of his characters in *Bocksgesang*.

Irony is akin both to tragedy and comedy; the degree of astringency of its resolutions makes it a source of laughter in one case and a cause for grave emotion in the other. Like the earlier drama, *Spiegelmensch*, this one grew out of the artist's consciousness of his own ironical situations vis-à-vis society. His feelings as a Jewish poet and intellectual certainly heightened this awareness. Like his character Feiwl, Franz Werfel had joined radical revolutionaries in hopes that a new social order would emerge from their activities and erase old inequalities and injustices.

The Jew, Feiwl, first appears in a situation that seems to hold for him only a continuation of the age-old miseries that a Jew was subject to in the late nineteenth century in a Slavic country. He comes on the stage as one of three spokesmen for the landless poor who seek a few acres from the council of rich elders. He is put off to the last, and when he does have his chance to speak for the poor he is by that time so distressed that he can utter only recriminations over the contemptuous treatment that he and his hard-working people receive and can always expect. Yet in the revolt led against these rich landowners by a crazed prophet and a deluded student, Feiwl temporarily assumes an important role. At the crisis of the rebellion he is even asked to ring the church bells. His reaction to that request reveals his triumphant realization of the irony involved: "Heil! heil! Der Jud' wird die Christenglocken läuten, der Jud', der Jud'l" (p. 121)<sup>6</sup> That cry wells from the momentary release from persecution that all European Jews have known. And as a Jew born in Prague and as a private in the German army, Franz Werfel himself was aware of the increasing disabilities that threatened all Jews because of the growing "Aryan" myth madness, which is first attributed to Count Joseph Arthur de Vovineau as stated in his *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (1855).<sup>7</sup> As a term and slogan "anti-Semitism" was first coined in 1879 by Wilhelm Marr. This racism then became a convenient tool of Pan-German imperialism as fostered particularly in Austria by Georg von Schoenerer. The misapplication of Nietzschean views made anti-Semitism especially virulent in the period of radical revolts following the German defeat in World War I. It led Werfel to emulate the

6. "Heil! Heil! The Jew is going to ring the Christian bells, the Jew, the Jew!" *The Theatre Guild Anthology* (New York, Random House, 1936), p. 426. All textual translations from *The Goat's Song* will hereafter be derived from the same source.

7. For this general summary and the specific references to Jewish history, I am indebted particularly to Howard M. Sachar's *The Course of Modern Jewish History* (Cleveland: The World Book Company, 1958), pp. 233 ff.

revolutionaries of 1848. As is made clear by Alma Mahler Werfel, he took part in the demonstrations that resulted in the abdication of the Hapsburg emperor.

"And I heard of Werfel delivering wild, socialistic speeches in the city streets and climbing on benches along the Ring-Strasse to shout, 'Storm the banks!' and other inane revolutionary slogans."<sup>8</sup>

Feiwl also is a revolutionary with principles despite his resorting to political expediency and stretching the truth at times. In the first stages of the outbreak, he alone senses the animalistic nature of those surrounding him, and he asks them ironic questions: ". . . Warum lasst ihr euch jagen? Ist der Mensch ein Tier?" (p. 78).<sup>9</sup> He alone attempts to halt the initial mob hysteria as he hears its maniacal laughter: "Hört auf so zu lachen, Gott meiner Väter!" (p. 95).<sup>10</sup>

Later, Feiwl reports with ironic amusement at the place chosen as headquarters by Juvan, the leader of the rebels, a church. Feiwl comments on the irony of soldiers of freedom and justice ending up as drunken murderers and pillagers. He protests against this needless bloodshed. Ironic perception marks his subsequent exchange with Juvan:

Juvan: "Jud! Weisst du, warum du der niedrigste aller Menschen bist?"

Feiwl: "Dafür gibt es viele Meinungen."

Juvan: "Weil du den Blutdurst nicht verstehst."

Feiwl: "Seht! Und gerade deshalb habe ich mich bisher für den Auserwählten unter den Menschen gehalten." (p. 103).<sup>11</sup>

Feiwl also makes this ironic observation when Juvan at the altar breaks a large cross over his knee and throws it into the mob: "Oi, der Gehenkel!" (p. 107), an expression most loosely translated on the New York stage as "Oi, my poor brother!"<sup>12</sup> And when even the rational American succumbs to the "Black Mass" hysteria, Feiwl still retains his good sense and prays to the God of his people:

"Boruch ato adonaj elohenu adonaj ehcod! Um gesund zu bleiben!" (p. 111).<sup>13</sup>

This prayer marks the despised Jew as the only civilized person in that bestial crowd.

As already indicated, Feiwl attains his greatest irony when commissioned to ring the church bells at the hideous consummation of the

8. Alma Mahler Werfel, pp. 126-127.

9. ". . . Why do you let yourselves be chased? Is man an animal?" *Theater Guild*, p. 412.

10. "Stop that laughing, God of my Fathers!" *Guild*, p. 418.

11. Juvan: "Jew! Do you know why you are the lowest of all men?"

Feiwl: "Everyone has a different reason."

Juvan: "Because you cannot understand bloodlust."

Feiwl: "Look at that. I thought that was what made us the chosen people!" *Guild*, p. 420.

12. *Guild*, p. 421.

13. *Guild*, p. 422, with a slight change includes the Hebrew prayer but omits the final line, here translated: "Keep us sane!"

pagan ritual. Then with customary shrewdness he escapes the vengeance of the troops come to restore order. At the end of the drama, he emerges again in his old role of an obsequious peddler, but he is now capitalizing upon the shortages caused by the uprising which he helped lead. To Feiwel, one can apply the statement Werfel made regarding Arnold Schönberg: "I know the entire conflict of this man. He is a Jew—the Jew who suffers from himself."<sup>14</sup> Such was the role of the Jew as Werfel historically saw it. But as this drama also shows, he believed that a conventional, rich young man can likewise enmesh himself in ironical situations.

As the only son of wealthy parents, Mirko Milič appears in the opening scene to be blessed with happy prospects. He is betrothed to Stanja, the daughter of another wealthy couple. He has accepted parental notions of "success" to the extent that he promises to become another typical wife-beating, money-loving young squire. He has been so fearful of parental displeasure that for twenty years he has stifled all curiosity concerning the mysterious stone hut that houses a horror of some kind. He trusts his parents to continue shielding him from its secret. Ironically enough, however, his father can plan after Mirko's marriage to enter a monastery and let the son bear the burden of that horror all by himself. The obedient son can then discover that the stone building houses his brother, a monster that neither of the parents can bring himself to face. Yet the mother loves the monster more than she does his brother, Mirko. She even weeps tears of joy when Mirko is killed during the "Black Mass" ritual while in the church sanctuary the monster attacks Stanja, Mirko's defiant betrothed. As the rich young landowner, he has been almost proud of his weakness for Stanja; he describes himself to her as ". . . Ein Jagdhund, nach deinen Schweißgeruch wittere. . ." (p. 82).<sup>15</sup> This pride leads him to defend his honor over a woman who does not want to be defended and results in his death. His last words are a filial cry to a father who wastes no grief on the corpse. While that death cry is echoing through the church, the monster, one of Nature's own special ironies, is raping the bride of the dying man. And she conceives.

Stanja thus appears to play the crucial ironic role in *Bocksgesang*. She represents, in fact, the eternal, elemental woman as Werfel seems to have loved and admired her in his *Alma*. Though in the first two acts, Stanja figures only as the docile daughter accepting her betrothal and her parting from her parents, she soon lives up to her father's description of her as "clever." In the first few minutes on the farm she senses the secret of the mysterious building. She soon also detects Mirko's weaknesses. Her instinctive nature leads her to Juvan, sitting

14. *Alma Mahler Werfel*, p. 93.

15. ". . . Sniffing the odor of your body like a hound." *Guild*, p. 413.

at the table in front of the inn. She feels that he is the student she had once momentarily met and fallen in love with at first sight. She recognizes a kinship with this student who has exiled himself from the society of the city as well as from the fellowship of the landless poor now surrounding him. But the action of the drama implies that Werfel saw this woman as superior to both the heir and the rebel. During the "Black Mass" she obeys her instincts and scorns everyone present, including Juvan, who has deluded himself with the prophet's role he has assumed. She mocks Juvan and the mob as she stands before the Ikonostas and voices her sacrilegious defiance: "Hier stand ich schon, Gott zu empfangen." (p. 118).<sup>16</sup>

Toward the end of the drama when Juvan is to be hanged by the forces of law and order, she experiences a climactic irony. Juvan rejects her pleas that she die with him in an escape attempt. He tells her that she must live because he cannot die bravely unless he knows that she lives on as his wife. She then realizes that there is no way out for her. If Juvan must be let to die deceiving himself with her assurances of her virginity, then she must live and give birth to the monster's offspring. Her final speech reveals this secret to the mother who has been bemoaning the loss, not of the normal son, Mirko, but of the monster. It is further ironic that the elemental woman, Stanja, who has mated with a "plaything" of nature, as the physician describes the monster, is both the victim and agent of Nature, the dark shaper of human destiny. One German critic has graphically described this woman and her role as Werfel regarded her:

Aus dem weiblichen Schosze bricht immer das Helle und Dunkle, das Glück und das Grauen, der Geist und der Trieb, der Got und das Tier, Kosmos und Chaos, Zukunft und Vergangenheit.<sup>17</sup>

Many of the devices of dramatic expressionism spotlight the ironies in the role of Juvan, the rebel-student. He stands as the focal point of chanting choruses; he cries out his message urging the folk to return to the viscerogenic life of animals in the forest; he is addressed by the crazed old Bogoboj and the maid Kruna as the one sent by the "Immortals" who tend the magic goat herds in the mountains; he turns the church into a nightmarish stage; he allies himself in spirit with the escaped monster who has fled from the forest into the inner sanctuary. Yet in reality, Juvan is only a poor youth of uncertain parentage who has managed to become a student and gain thereby the prestige traditionally accorded the European learned man. In his earlier struggles he has learned how twisted and sly courses may win approval in

16. "Here I have already stood to receive God." *Guild*, p. 425.

17. Writer's translation: "Out of the womb of woman streams ever illumination and darkness, joy and terror, intellect and desire, the divine and the animal, cosmos and chaos, the past and the future." Albert Soergel, *Dichtung und Dichter der Zeit* (Leipzig: R. Voigtländer Verlag, 1926), p. 492.

urban society, and he has not found anything more admirable among the poor and homeless. One placed in such a situation may well suffer unexpected reversals. Juvan succumbs to both fertility-rite primitivism and to the powerful attraction of Stanja, the strong, independent female. He seeks to submerge himself in this primitive return to feral life and takes the leadership in the pillaging and killing that characterize the rebellion. Yet he continues so conventional in values that he wants to die savoring the delusion that Stanja remains a chaste virgin after he had virtually delivered her to the monster. Perhaps as Franz Werfel did himself in the Vienna riots, Feiwell recognized the ironical contradictions in the actions of the revolutionary who seeks justice only for himself.

No reversal in the play is more ironic than that of Stevan Milič and his wife. At the beginning, they appear to be gratified parents who see in the betrothal of their son to Stanja the union of two great estates and the promise of growing social and political power. Then their superstitious fears and anguished pride emerge in their discussion as to what must be done about the monster they have managed to hide during the past twenty years. Stevan's torment over the monster's escape precipitates the violence of the rebellion that engulfs the whole countryside in fire and blood. Yet at the end of the destruction when the Milič fields and property have been devastated and the sons both killed, these parents experience a rejuvenation. They discover that they no longer need sacrifice themselves to pride and position. They have been delivered from the presence of their monstrous offspring who poisoned their marriage. They can begin anew to build a home and a life for themselves. In their fresh hope and vitality, they tenderly rediscover one another as husband and wife. Like a new Adam and Eve they enjoy an appetite for the future ahead of them despite its hardships. One wonders, however, what tempering effect their final knowledge of Stanja's condition will have upon them. For the final line in the play is Stanja's revelation to the mother: "Ich habe ein Kind von ihm." (p. 160)<sup>18</sup> Would the mother be relieved to learn that she is mistaken about there not remaining even a trace in the world of the monstrous son whom she loved?

This final irony in a drama of reversals confirms the unity of insight behind its authorship. Werfel's reliance upon startling stage effects and typical expressionistic devices in no way detracts from its structure and concept in irony. In the hands of a lesser master, such devices and the same subject matter might well have deteriorated into mere bombast and sentiment. In its larger irony, furthermore, *Bocksgesang* is also a prefiguration of the Nazi madness that was yet to come.

18. "I am carrying his child." *Guild*, p. 438.

ALEXANDER SCHARBACH

## HISTORY, AUTOBIOGRAPHY, AND THE SHADOW OF A GUNMAN

Sean O'Casey is said to prefer his first major work, *The Shadow of a Gunman*, to his next play, *Juno and the Paycock*. To many of his readers, however, *The Shadow of a Gunman* has seemed much more limited, local, and topical in appeal. Passing judgement on O'Casey's achievement in this play in *The Nineteenth Century and After* (April, 1925), Andrew E. Malone has declared that "his characters are taken from the slums of Dublin, and his theme is little more than a commentary upon the warlike conditions of the city during the year 1920." One purpose of this article is to suggest that this verdict is a deceptive half-truth. O'Casey certainly does provide a realistic cross-section of life in a Dublin slum in 1920, and, as will be shown, the play certainly acquires greater significance when it is related to the social and political history of that year. But even where O'Casey's representation is closest to social or historical fact it exhibits a distinctive tone and colouring imparted by his imagination in obedience to a dramatic design. Moreover, a comparison between the play and certain parts of his autobiography, *Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well* (1949) reveals that the personal element in the play is more important than the historical one because it helped to determine its form and the interpretation of life which that form was designed to emphasize.

O'Casey dates the period of his play as May, 1920. During this month the bitter struggle between the Crown and the Irish separatist movement known as Sinn Féin ("We Ourselves") reached a critical stage. Before the end of 1919, Sinn Féin and its legislative assembly, Dáil Éireann, had been declared illegal, and Lloyd George had devised his "Bill for the Better Government of Ireland," which recommended separate parliaments for the six northeastern counties and for the other twenty-six counties of Ireland. This scheme for partition at once intensified the struggle between Sinn Féin and the British Executive in Ireland. After the shooting of a policeman in Dublin on February 20th, 1920, a curfew was imposed on the city, making it illegal for any persons other than members of the Crown forces to be in the streets between midnight and 5 a.m. Soon afterwards the curfew period was extended and began at 8 p.m. On March 24th, four days before the Second Reading of Lloyd George's Bill at Westminster, the power of the British Executive was reinforced by the first detachments of a special police force recruited from the toughest ex-servicemen of

the First World War. These detachments wore khaki coats with black trousers and black caps and were promptly christened "the Black and Tans" after a well-known Tipperary pack of foxhounds. To combat these forces, the Irish Republican Army split into small groups of fifteen to thirty men who used guerilla tactics to keep their foes under constant strain. Many of its fighters lived on the run, moving continuously from place to place and seldom sleeping at home. By May, 1920, the forces of the Crown were being gradually forced back to their headquarters in Dublin and many Irish Protestants who had previously been strong supporters of the Union with England had become passive spectators of the struggle.

Most of these facts are vividly reflected in *The Shadow of a Gunman* which had an immense local appeal when it was first acted at the Abbey Theatre on April 12th, 1923. Its action hinges on the fact that a poet, Donal Davoren, who has recently come to share a Dublin tenement with Seumas Shields, allows himself to be regarded as a gunman "on the run." *On the Run*, indeed, was O'Casey's original title for the play and he abandoned it only because a drama of that name already existed. Another character, Maguire, is a real gunman on the run and is killed in a guerilla action not far from Dublin. A third character, Grigson, is an Orangeman and professes loyalty to the Crown, but he is politically passive and assures Davoren that "there never was a drop av informer's blood in the whole family av Grigson." While Grigson is out drinking during the curfew period, his wife is worried in case he may be shot by the Black and Tans. Soon after Grigson's safe return, shots are heard in the lane outside and Davoren and Shields are terrified at the prospect of a raid because Maguire has left a bag of bombs in their room. Shields prays that the raiders may be Tommies and not the dreaded Tans.

Discussing the behaviour of the Black and Tans in *The Revolution in Ireland* (1923), W. Alison Phillips primly remarks that "there is evidence that some of these men—by no means all—brought to Ireland the loose views as to the rights of property which had been current during the war at the front, and helped themselves to what they needed without in these requisitions always discriminating between the loyal and the disloyal." In the play, Mrs. Grigson's description of how the Black and Tans treat her husband puts flesh on the dry bones of this generalization. To prove his loyalty, Grigson puts a big *Bible* on his table, open at the First Epistle of St. Peter, with a pious text on obedience to the King marked in red ink. The representatives of the Crown are unimpressed, however; the Black and Tans fling Grigson's *Bible* on the floor, interpret his picture of King William crossing the Boyne as seditious propaganda, and force him to sing, "We shall meet

in the Sweet Bye an' Bye" as they drink his whisky. After arresting Minnie Powell, who had bravely concealed Maguire's bombs in her room, the Black and Tans raid another house and immediately afterwards are caught in the ambush in which Minnie is killed.

The setting of the play reinforces the strong local interest of these events. The scene represents "A room in a tenement in Hilljoy Square, Dublin." There is no such place as "Hilljoy Square" in Dublin, but the significant combination of "hill," "joy," and "square" and some other details in the play made it pretty certain that O'Casey was representing a tenement in Mountjoy Square, which is situated in the northeastern part of the city and was built between 1792 and 1818 at a time when it was fashionable to live on the north side of the Liffey. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the south side had again become the fashionable residential area, and many of the fine Georgian houses in Mountjoy Square and the surrounding district had been converted into tenements which were occupied by the poorest citizens. The Georgian architecture of Mountjoy Square and its surroundings no doubt explains why the scene of the play is described as a *Return Room*, in which two large windows *occupy practically the whole of the back wall space*, and why Mr. Galloher and his family are described as the tenants of a "front drawing-room" and their obnoxious neighbours, the Dwyers, as the tenants of a "back drawing-room" in a house nearby.

In May, 1920, the tenements of Dublin were appallingly overcrowded. In 1913, a Local Government Board Commission recorded that 21,000 families were living in one-room tenements, of which 9,000 were occupied by four or more persons. In O'Casey's play, Mr. Galloher's tenement falls into the latter category for it is occupied by his two children as well as his wife and himself. The complaint which Galloher makes to Davoren, whom he regards as an important member of the Irish Republican Army, is due to over-crowded conditions of life. Despite his protests, Mrs. Dwyer has persisted in allowing her children to keep the hall door open and to use the hall as a playground. "The name calling and the language" of the Dwyers is "something abominable" and Mrs. Galloher often has to lock her door to keep them from assaulting her. Galloher fears that things will get worse when Mr. Dwyer, a seaman, comes home, and anxiously petitions the Irish Republican Army for protection.

The quaintly-worded petition which Galloher brings to Davoren establishes yet another connection between the play and the revolutionary situation in Ireland in May, 1920. Early in 1920, the Dáil Éireann began to organize its own police and its own law courts in opposition to those of the Crown. By June, Republican courts had been estab-

lished in no less than twenty-one counties and the royal judges who went on circuit found no litigants awaiting them. In May and June the pressure of business in the Republican courts became so great that the Dáil was obliged to limit the cases to be heard to those licensed by its Minister for Home Affairs. Against this background, Gallogher's letter of May 21st to the "Gentlemen of the Irish Republican Army" acquires additional significance. The anomalous legal conditions of the time explain why he carefully excuses himself for having taken out a summons against the Dwyers because "there was no Republican Courts" at the time when he did so, and why he adds that he did not proceed with it because he has "a strong objection to foreign courts as such." He goes on to urge the Republicans to send "some of your army or police," preferably with guns, to his tenement, for he believes that he has "a Primmy Fashy Case against Mrs. Dwyer and all her heirs."

O'Casey certainly made abundant use of local geography and history when he wrote *The Shadow of a Gunman*. But his choice of material is selective and his treatment is consistently ironical. There is a visual irony in the very setting in which Shield's meagre, slovenly furnishings clutter a room in a Georgian mansion in a once-fashionable square. The dangers of the curfew period set Mrs. Grigson worrying about her absent husband, but they also produce the irony of her canny speculation: "Do the insurance companies pay if a man is shot after curfew?" In their treatment of Grigson, the Black and Tans are the unconscious agents of the irony of poetic justice because Grigson is a boastful tippler who treats his wife like a skivvy. The Republican Courts were established with the high purpose of saving Ireland from anarchy during a time of great emergency; Gallogher expects them to sort out a tenement squabble. If O'Casey had preserved his original title, *On the Run*, it would have combined irony with topicality since Davoren is an artist "on the run" in search of peaceful conditions of work, not the dedicated gunman he is taken for. In *The Playboy of the Western World*, the pose so artfully assumed by Christie Mahon stimulates both his imagination and that of his admirers; in *The Shadow of a Gunman*, Davoren's half-hearted pose illustrates only his vanity and evokes only vainglory or self-interest in such characters as Tommy Owens, Grigson, and Gallogher. The saddest of the many ironies in the play is that Minnie Powell sacrifices herself for a versifier whom she regards as a patriot as well as a poet.

## II

Minnie Powell represents the most positive set of values in *The Shadow of a Gunman*. These values emerge chiefly from the interaction

between Minnie, Davoren, and Shields. A comparison between the play and the third and fourth sections of *Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well* (1949) provides good reasons for believing that these three characters had their origins in certain experiences described by O'Casey in this autobiography and that he modified and intensified these experiences to create the contrast between Minnie, Davoren, and Shields which is the main theme of the play.

In his autobiography, O'Casey describes how the behavior of his brother made it impossible for him to carry on with his creative writing in their Dublin tenement and how he moved to another tenement in a different house. This parallels Davoren's move from one tenement to another so as to be able to work in peace. One night when O'Casey lay in bed in his new abode the house was raided by Black and Tans; in the play, Davoren finds himself in the same predicament. In his autobiography, O'Casey describes "a volley of battering blows on the obstinate wooden door, mingled with the crash of falling glass" which indicated that "the panels on each side of it had been shattered by hammer or rifle-butt." These details are closely paralleled by the stage-direction in the play: *There is heard at the street door a violent and continuous knocking, followed by the crash of glass and the beating of the door with rifle butts.* As O'Casey awaited the entry of the raiders, he thought of Whitman's lines, "Come lovely and soothing death, Undulate round the world, serenely arriving," and pondered the fact that "Death doesn't arrive serenely here. . . ." Correspondingly, Davoren recalls Shelley's description of "the cold chaste moon. . . Who makes all beautiful on which she smiles," and bitterly reflects that the moon "couldn't make this thrice accursed room beautiful."

At the back of the house described in the autobiography is a "large shed that was said to be used as a carpenter's shop" by O'Casey's neighbor, Mr. Ballynoy, a thin, delicate man who was reputed to care "for no manner of politics." A similar building appears in the play when Shields mentions that "There's a stable at the back of the house with an entrance from the yard; it's used as a carpenter's shop." Shields goes on to suggest that this shop is used for the manufacture of bombs, but whether this is so is never revealed, and in the play the passage about it is rather redundant. The carpenter's shop probably found its way into the play because the Black and Tans discovered that the shed described in the autobiography contained a large quantity of explosives. These had evidently been manufactured by Mr. Ballynoy, who was wounded when he tried to prevent the raiders from entering the shed. As he stands in the lorry after his arrest, Ballynoy's final gesture is one of patriotic defiance: "Up th' Republic!" he shouted with the full force of his voice." This gesture is strikingly

paralleled in the play; when Minnie Powell is thrust into a lorry after her arrest, she shouts "Up the Republic!" at the top of her voice.

Though O'Casey's sympathies were with the Republicans, there were moments when he grew weary of the fighting and contemplated both sides with a jaundiced eye: "Gun peals and slogan cries were things happy enough in a song, but they made misery in a busy street. . . . The sovereign people were having a tough time of it from enemies on the left and friends on the right. Going out for a stroll, or to purchase a necessary, no one knew when he'd have to fall flat on his belly, to wait for death to go by, in the midst of smoke and fire and horrifying noises. . . . Christian Protestant England and Christian Catholic Ireland were banging away at each other for God, for King, and Country." In the play Shields re-echoes these bitter sentiments when he exclaims, "It's the civilians that suffer; when there's an ambush, they don't know where to run. Shot in the back to save the British Empire, an' shot in the breast to save the soul of Ireland. I'm a Nationalist meself, right enough . . . but I draw the line when I hear the gunmen blowin' about dyin' for the people, when it's the people that are dyin' for the gunmen!"

### III

In its modification of the personal experiences and feelings just described, O'Casey's imagination makes Davoren an embodiment of frustrated life, Shields an embodiment of life turned sour and superstitious, and Minnie Powell an embodiment of an ideal fullness of life, in order to create that intense contrast between masculine and feminine nature which is fundamental to his interpretation of human existence. The particular form of Davoren's frustration is that of an artist at odds with society; Shields is a nationalist who has degenerated into abysmal selfishness. The two characters are aptly symbolized by certain properties among the untidy furnishings of their tenement: the self-protective superstition of Shields by the crucifix and the statues of the Virgin and the Sacred Heart on the mantelpiece; the aesthetic aspirations of Davoren by the flowers, the books and the typewriter<sup>1</sup> on the table. Both have catch-phrases expressive of their exaggerated discontents. Shields makes any annoyance, however trivial, an excuse for invective against the "Irish People" as a whole, and his misanthropy persistently finds vent in the refrain, "Oh, Kathleen ni Houlihan, your way's a thorny way." Whenever Davoren's attempts to write are interrupted, he echoes the words of Shelley's tormented Prometheus,

1. One is rather surprised to find that the impecunious Davoren owns a typewriter. Like the carpenter's shop, it may have found its way into the play *via* the experiences recounted in *Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well*. In the sixth section of this autobiography, O'Casey records how he managed to acquire a secondhand typewriter by hire-purchase just after the events already described.

"Ah me! alas, pain, pain, pain ever, for ever." Each of them proudly claims that his creed sets him above fear. According to Shields, "No man need be afraid with a crowd of angels round him; thanks to God for His Holy religion!" and Davoren retorts, "You're welcome to your angels; philosophy is mine; philosophy that makes the coward brave; the sufferer defiant; the weak strong. . . ." A second later a volley of shots outside reduces both of them to the same state of abject fear.

For all the mock-heroic effect of his Promethean pose, Davoren is not an unsympathetic character. Unlike Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, he is a portrait of the artist as a not-so-young man subject to the withering effects of poverty, the noise and interruptions of slum life, and the danger of sudden death in a time of revolution and war. Yet his aesthetic creed has much in common with that of Dedalus. It is described at the outset of the play as a devotion to "*the might of design, the mystery of colour, and the belief in the redemption of all things by beauty everlasting.*" These phrases are borrowed from Dubedat's climactic speech in the fourth act of Shaw's *The Doctor's Dilemma*. They are repeated when Shields maliciously remarks that "a poet's claim to greatness depends upon his power to put passion in the common people," and Davoren bitterly replies, ". . . to the people there is no mystery of colour. . . . To them the might of design is a three-roomed house or a capacious bed. To them beauty is for sale in a butcher's shop. . . . The poet ever strives to save the people; the people ever strive to destroy the poet." This is a central issue in the play. It is put to the test by Davoren's reactions to Minnie Powell.

Characteristically, Davoren is reluctant to admit Minnie when she knocks gently on his door. But their conversation reveals that this daughter of the people is an unconscious devotee of all that Davoren values most; she loves beauty, design, and colour in the forms available to her—the poetry of Burns, the music of Tommy Owens's melodeon, and the flowers on Davoren's table. What is more, she has the courage and the feeling of community that Davoren lacks; "I don't know how you like to be by yourself," she tells him, "I couldn't stick it long." Davoren forgets his timidity as he joyfully realizes that Minnie embodies his ideals; "My soul within art thou, Minnie!" he exclaims, but after she has gone his exaltation gives way to uneasiness as he ponders the dangers of being "the shadow of a gunman" to please her.

Shield's reaction to Minnie exhibits his misanthropy at its worst. She is "an ignorant little bitch that thinks of nothing but jazz dances, fox-trots, picture theatres an' dress" and would "give the world an' all to be gaddin' about with a gunman" but would not grieve long if he were shot or hung. As for her courage, "She wouldn't sacrifice a jazz dance to save a man's life." Minnie gives the lie to this and to Davoren's as-

sertion that "the people ever strive to destroy the poet" when she takes the bombs from their room and is killed after being arrested. Shields is unmoved by this sacrifice; he sees in it nothing more than a gratifying confirmation of his superstitious belief that the tapping on the wall was an ill omen. But for Davoren it is a tragic experience which leads him to know his own nature better; he recognizes that he is "poltroon and poet," and it is a measure of his development that in his final lament Shelley's words, "Ah me, alas! Pain, pain, pain ever, for ever!" no longer sound mock-heroic on his lips. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Dedalus's aesthetic adventure ends with an inspiring epiphany of beauty; Davoren's ends with a revelation of the moral inadequacy of his creed.

The contrast between Davoren and Shields and Minnie Powell raises *The Shadow of a Gunman* to a tragic level. This major design is reinforced by several lesser but parallel contrasts. Like Davoren and Shields, most of the other men in the play are intent on vanity or self-preservation; only the women show themselves capable of courage and charity like Minnie Powell's. The pathetic Mr. Gallogher is under the wing of the immensely maternal Mrs. Henderson, who teases him out of his timidity and admires his fantastic prose. Grigson's drinking and boasting flourish at the expense of Mrs. Grigson, who lets him have most of their food, *getting just enough to give her strength to do the necessary work of the household*. In the face of danger and death, a moral paralysis afflicts the men, whereas the sympathies of the women expand; Mrs. Grigson mourns the death of Minnie and Mrs. Henderson is arrested for fighting the Black and Tans. *The Shadow of a Gunman* is skillfully constructed to create a contrast between the masculine and the feminine character as stern as that elaborated in *Juno and the Paycock*. The most significant difference between *The Shadow of a Gunman* and O'Casey's autobiography lies in the substitution of Minnie Powell for Mr. Ballynoy. No less than Yeats' Countess Cathleen and Synge's Deirdre, Minnie Powell treads the thorny way of Cathleen ni Houlihan; Shields' catch-phrase is more revelant than he will ever realize. It is this mythopoeic level of meaning which makes *The Shadow of a Gunman* much more than "a commentary upon the warlike conditions of the city during the year 1920" and brings it into contact with what Yeats called the *anima mundi*, the world of ideal passion, to which the tragic heroine aspires even at the cost of her physical destruction.

WILLIAM A. ARMSTRONG

## BOOK REVIEWS

**PLAY WITHIN A PLAY: THE DRAMATIST'S CONCEPTION OF HIS ART: SHAKESPEARE TO ANOUILH**, by Robert J. Nelson, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1958, 182 pp. Price \$4.00.

This book is derived from a doctoral dissertation offered at Columbia University in 1955, and it evidently carries Dr. Nelson's theme into areas somewhat more recondite than a dissertation committee usually sanctions. The dissertation was a survey of the play within a play in French drama. The present work is a series of critical essays on a number of playwrights of major importance—Shakespeare, Rotrou, Corneille, Molière, Marivaux, Scribe, Dumas, Schnitzler, Pirandello, Sartre and Anouilh: it may be said to cover the ground. In a work of this sort, the germinal idea can hardly be more than vestigial. Nevertheless it is upon a series of plays in which other plays are performed that the author strings his commentary.

The reality of a play is derivative; drama is a reflection of the outerworld, not the outerworld itself. In a play within a play, one goes a step further into the looking-glass. In this special situation we, as audience, are invited to witness the life of another audience which is in turn witnessing a play which we also see. The result is a play of mirrors, so to speak, image within image, the studied contemplation of which is calculated to make even strong men dizzy.

As this situation brings out in bold relief the writer in his professional capacity and the audience in its special character, a peculiarly intimate relationship is set up in which the writer may be expected to confide something of his professional secret. For this reason, no doubt, it has occurred to a number of scholars in the last decades to study the play within a play as a special dramatic phenomenon. To Dr. Nelson also it has appeared that through a study of this sort one might arrive somehow at a closer understanding of the writer's idea of his art.

The device of writing a play in the course of which some other play is acted has long been a staple of the drama, and even of musical comedy. In most cases, the purpose is immediately obvious. Nobody, I believe, would read epistemological implications of any depth into *Kiss Me, Kate* or even *Redhead*. But playwrights have used this technique for a variety of purposes, some more abstruse than others. In *Hamlet* the inner play is used as a trap; in *L'Impromptu de Versailles* it is part of a polemic; in Chekhov's *Seagull*, part of the character study; and in Pirandello's plays—a whole series of them, of which the masterpiece is doubtless *Henry IV*—for the familiar demonstration of the unreality of reality. There is obviously good reason for studying such plays carefully, and it is undeniably an interesting exercise to consider the varied uses to which the inner play devices can be put. Dr. Nelson decides that Shakespeare uses it as a mirror, Rotrou as a miracle, Corneille as a piece of magic, Marivaux as a game, Scribe for confessional purposes, and so on. One might quarrel perhaps with the choice of these terms, but this is no great matter; the use of these terms can be sufficiently substantiated from the plays Dr. Nelson has chosen to discuss. The intellectual leap, however, by which he concludes that from the purpose which these inner plays serve in the particular plays under consideration we can deduce the playwright's idea of theater in general is less easy to take.

Shakespeare has Hamlet use *The Murder of Gonzago* as a trap. *The Murder of Gonzago*, it must be admitted, is no great shakes as a play, and it is not al-

together clear that it serves its purpose properly as a trap either. We can hardly conclude from these data that for Shakespeare the art of the theater is to perfect the better mousetrap. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare uses *Pyramus and Thisbe*, at least in part, to ridicule amateur actors. Can we conclude from this that for Shakespeare the function of comedy in the professional theatre is to promote business by holding up the mirror to the amateur stage?

I suppose the major difficulty with Dr. Nelson's study is in the spectacular mental gymnastics by which in each case he characterizes a dramatist generally by means of his practice in a particular play. I am not sure that Dr. Nelson really means to go so far. Indeed, his device of studying the play within a play is no more than an excuse for stringing together a series of loose essays on important playwrights, and it would perhaps have been better had he abandoned his dissertation topic entirely and written these essays without benefit of mousetraps and miracles. There is no special order perceptible in these digressions. Stepping off in each case from a play-within-a-play situation, Dr. Nelson mounts his theme and rides off in all directions. It is not a particularly stimulating performance, nor is it particularly amusing; but topographically, it is impressive.

Literary studies—like literature itself—fall into two general classes: the intelligible and the unintelligible. Each has its special charm and its special audience. There is a kind of scholarship—sometimes very learned—the object of which appears to be to wrap the subject in a cocoon of language from which ultimately, it is hoped, truth will emerge as a beautiful butterfly. I must confess that, although most of the material with which he deals is familiar to me, I have been unable to follow Dr. Nelson very far in the weaving of his word-web, nor has his theme progressed, to my mind, beyond the pupal stage. Nevertheless I might venture to express the hope that with time and temperature the miracle of metamorphosis will take place here ultimately, as it has elsewhere in less promising circumstances.

MAURICE VALENCY

*THE OFF-BROADWAY THEATRE*, edited by Richard Cordell and Lowell Matson, New York, Random House, 1959, 481 pp. Price \$5.00.

This anthology of seven plays is handsomely printed and a pleasure to hold in the hand; but its claim is misleadingly ambitious. The editors argue, in the course of an introduction that attempts to relate off-Broadway plays of the 1950's to earlier off-Broadway movements such as the Provincetown Playhouse and the Neighborhood Playhouse, that the pattern contributes to the contemporary scene in three ways: by a revival of classics, by a discovery of new or recent native and foreign plays never produced in New York or in the United States, and by a rediscovery of worthy plays. The truth is that off-Broadway is notorious for its lack of historical continuity. Groups issue manifestoes, flourish briefly, and disappear; they might never have existed less than two days after their final curtain descended. This reviewer agrees with Cordell and Matson that the definition of off-Broadway propagated by the editors of *Theatre Arts* ("everything not gloriously commercial, including colleges and universities in the Midwest, church groups in the Virgin Islands or Alaska, little theatres in Dallas or Saginaw") is muddy, and of no help to students of modern drama. But off-Broadway, for all its vigor and variety, is less than it should be; it is surprisingly unwilling to experiment; it is neither attracting nor developing serious young playwrights; it is not refining a repertory tradition (despite individual efforts); and it succumbs, with dismaying ease, to all the vices of Broadway productions, including higher prices. It may well be that the conditions of playgoing in New York have become such that no

solution is possible; but the salvation of the American theater, despite the earnest, intelligent best wishes of the editors of this anthology, will not come from an off-Broadway direction. Off-Broadway, in short, is interesting rather than influential as a phenomenon of the postwar years.

Hence, one cannot become unduly excited over any single play reprinted here, although each one provides an evening of playgoing pleasure. It is interesting that only James Lee's *Career*, with its surprising final line that the heartbreaks of the acting profession ("No home. No family. Twenty-five years that averaged twenty dollars a week.") are "worth it," deals with an American locale. The American soldier who agonizes in Alfred Hayes's *The Girl on the Via Flaminia* is always referred to as a rich and privileged soldier from across the sea; but he resembles Everyman, and the situation is deliberately universalized. Sean O'Casey's *Purple Dust* makes for splendid talk, of a sort all too rare in contemporary plays; *everyone* has kissed the Blarney Stone; but O'Casey has written better, and the point he makes is a small one, after all. *Dragon's Mouth*, by Jacquette Hawkes and J. B. Priestley, has turned into tedious print, although within the theatre it seemed like important debate. The staged "reading," we suspect, is a dead end. Certainly comparisons of *Dragon's Mouth* with *Don Juan in Hell* have not been generous to the former, or pleasing to the Priestleys. Jean Anouilh's *Ardèle*, despite its hunchback symbolism, can be a moving experience; and James Forsyth's *Héloïse*, which retells the medieval story of Abelard with considerably more sympathy than Mark Twain did in *The Innocents Abroad*, is poignantly, quietly beautiful.

Produced with taste and an indispensable minimum enthusiasm, any one of these plays could fit into a Broadway house. (Only Marjorie Barkentin's adaptation of James Joyce, *Ulysses in Nighttown*, produced under Padraic Colum's supervision, will remain forever limited in appeal, although in some ways it is the most ingenious solution to any of the problems set by these seven plays. It attempts much, and has a very special kind of integrity.) *Career* has been made into a film; *The Girl on the Via Flaminia* moved uptown soon after its original production; what has been done off-Broadway can be, and has been, done commercially for larger audiences. It is difficult to see the future writ small in off-Broadway productions. One may, however, be thankful that New York playgoers are so hungry for theatre that they willingly support these hundreds of groups, this actors' movement, in addition to the glossy and intellectually empty productions of midtown Manhattan. "No pleasure," Publius Syrus wrote two thousand years ago, "lasts long unless there is variety in it." And off-Broadway theatres certainly provide variety.

HAROLD OREL

**THE THEATRE OF BERTOLT BRECHT;** A Study From Eight Aspects, by John Willett, New York, New Directions, 1959. 272 pp. Price \$8.00.

John Willett's rather slender volume will be considered by any student of modern drama an indispensable reference work on Brecht the playwright and theorist. It represents to date the only comprehensive study of his work, and is, above all, the only book written about him in English. Readers familiar with the scholarly German tome by Ernst Schumacher on Brecht's early theatrical endeavors and the scanty Brecht studies published in France will welcome Willett's study of Brecht's entire theater as a much needed supplement.

But the book pinpoints only too clearly the dilemma with which its author was faced in writing it. With the exception of the *Threepenny Opera*, Brecht's plays

are still almost unknown to readers and audiences outside of Germany. To remedy this situation, the book's main part, entitled "Eight Aspects," is preceded by an elaborate "Groundwork," made up of analyses of Brecht's plays. But these matter-of-fact analyses are not as effective as their author would wish them to be in dispelling the "sweeping verdicts and confusing interpretations" to which the playwright has been subject. Nor do they convey to us the essence of that extraordinary dramatist who had had perhaps a greater impact on his own country in his own era than any other dramatist in history (cf. Kenneth Tynan, "The Theatre Abroad: Germany," September 12, 1959). Thus the reader of Willett's book will remain puzzled by the fact that Brecht's influence in Germany has been steadily growing since his return there in 1948, and particularly since his death, even though he spent fifteen of his mature years in exile away from Germany and its theater. Being familiar at best with Brecht's theatrical theories, he will wonder why Brecht is today the only contemporary German dramatist whose plays are greeted with tumultuous applause by audiences and critics and who can maintain fourth place in popularity after such favorite classics as Shakespeare, Schiller, and Goethe.

Obviously, a true appreciation of Brecht as a playwright cannot be gained from mere analyses but must be sought in the plays themselves and, above all, in their language. This language was once described by the critic Herbert Ihering as something one feels on the tongue, on the palate, in one's ears, one's spine; something brutally sensuous and melancholily tender, full of malice and bottomless sadness, of grim wit and plaintive lyricism. Willett's "Groundwork" fails to render the magic of this language that only excellent translations or adaptations could reveal.

One regrets, therefore, that the critic did not start his book with his discussion of the "Eight Aspects." For here his observations are penetrating and of a nature to arouse the interest which the dramatist deserves. In this main part of Willett's work is, indeed, revealed the Pirandello-like complexity of Brecht's view of life. Particularly rewarding are the chapters on "Language" and "Theory" (two of the eight aspects). Willett traces influences on Brecht's language from the Bible, old folk ballads, and Villon to Rimbaud, Kipling, and Tin-pan Alley. He considers Brecht's concept of *Verfremdung* as being derived from the Russian Formalist's "Priem Ostranenija," thus confirming my own observation, which I set forth in a paper presented at the MLA meeting in December 1958. Of interest also are the parallels which Willett draws between Brecht and some contemporary British poets, in his chapter on "The English Aspects".

Besides a short chronology of Brecht's work and the analyses of his plays, the book contains a helpful index, a wealth of scholarly notes and references, and an excellent bibliography.

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